
ACKS: Collected Wisdom by Chapter

Answers from the Autarchs about the Adventurer Conqueror King System

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Compiled by Eric Maloof



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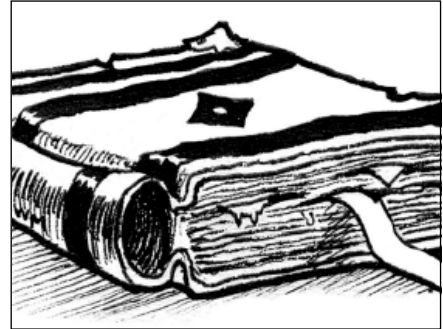
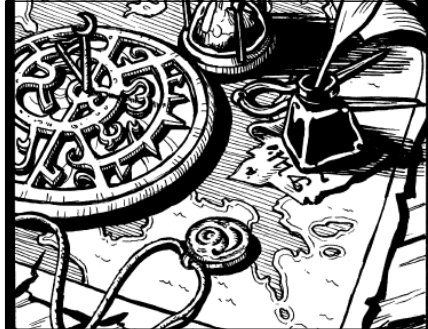
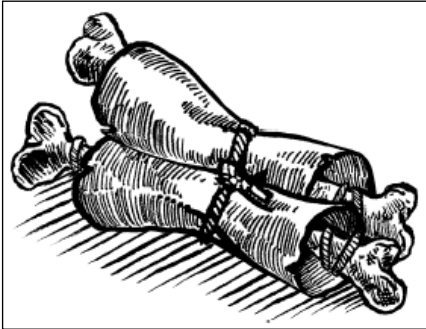
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Introduction

The Adventurer Conqueror King System is a living, breathing ruleset. It is an elegant piece of design, using sound principles of economics to rebuild the B/X rules from the ground up. Enhancing the printed rules are the forums at autarch.co. This document is a collection of the primary designer's various words of wisdom on those forums over the years. The topics include both variant "house-rules" and clarifications of the ruleset.



Format

The format used herein groups Alex's posts by subject type. Links to the original forum posts have been included with each entry. This will make it easy for the reader to quickly peruse the discussion in its entirety.

As Alex is a regular contributor to the Autarch forums, this document is a volume, which covers his posts up to a specific date. The last date is included on the cover page. Future volumes will be created as needed. Questions and comments can be emailed to lordclaw@gmail.com or send a a PM to Malo Monkey on the forums.

Enjoy.

Autarch Insights

The Secret Ratio

<http://autarch.co/blog/secret-ratio>

July 08, 2011

Tag: **Insight**

Alex wrote:

A secret ratio recurs repeatedly throughout ACKS. It is 1:33, and it is implicit in many of the game mathematics. Interestingly, the 1:33 ratio *emerged* from the assumptions of the system; it wasn't initially designed in. The first place the secret ratio appeared was in the average rate of return on gold invested per month in support of mercantile activities, which is 3% (3/100 or 1/33). I noticed the ratio when I was building spreadsheets to model landlords and merchants.

- 1,000gp invested in agricultural improvement will attract on average 5.5 peasants yielding around 6gp per month, or 33gp. (3.3%)*
- 18,000gp invested in cargo and a small sailing ship will return 600gp in profits per month (3.3%)
- 36,500gp invested in cargo and a 40-wagon caravan will return 1,100gp in profits per month (3.0%)
- 50,000gp invested in cargo and a large sailing ship will return 1,800gp in profits per month (3.6%)

*I shed a single tear of joy when I noticed that 99gp was very close to the average starting income of a PC (105gp), suggesting that your average adventurer's equipment roughly represented the net worth of a peasant who has liquidated his farm and cows. The perfection with which this worked out represents either the Providence of Divine Gygax, or really good baseline assumptions.

This ratio became very useful in other areas of play as it allowed us to work out the approximate "capital" of individuals with known income, or conversely, the approximate income of individuals with a known amount of capital. (Note that capital is loosely defined here -- a fighter who has spent thousands of gold carousing while bragging of his exploits has essentially "invested" in his reputation. We assume for the sake of simplicity that coin, equipment, training, carousing, etc all have an equal rate of return).

Examples:

- A peasant, earning 3gp per month, probably has (3×33) 99gp in capital. This is probably seed, farming implements, and perhaps some domestic animals.
- An alchemist, earning 75gp per month, probably has (75×33) 2,475gp in capital - lab equipment, books, chemical mixtures, potions, and coin.
- The emperor of a massive domain, with an income of 360,000gp per month, has capital of around 11,880,000gp.
- A warrior (2nd level fighter) with 1,500gp invested in equipment, training, and so on, would expect to earn 45gp per month $(1500 / 33)$.

Since about 80% of experience points in ACKS are derived from gold, its easy to determine the capital of an NPC by multiplying his XP by 80%. That in turn enables one to calculate the amount of money the character would expect to earn per month. This solves the age-old problem of "how much does it cost to hire an NPC of such-and-such level".

Even better, since we know the average income of various ranks of nobility, it also shows how the wages of characters of various levels compare against that of nobility. At 9th level a character's income from his skills suggest he should be earning as much as an earl or count - which, in turn, suggests that your 9th level warlord who has built a stronghold and carved out a domain can safely style himself as an earl or count.

Where to Start? New to “Old School”

<http://autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/where-start-new-old-school>

April 28, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Chaosmeister wrote:

Greetings all,

the title says it all! I started gaming around the time DnD was released, however as I live in Germany I started with The Dark Eye instead of DnD. Because of this I missed the Original playstyle and rules. My first contact with DnD was actually ADnD 2nd. ACK is the first game I bought that seems part of the Old school renaissance? Sorry, As I said, not very familiar with this side of gaming yet.

I am reading the ACK core book at the moment and It contains many things I find.. weird. XP for treasure is one example that springs to my mind was the first where I though “WTF?”. I will try to roll with it even though it goes against my instincts. I come from a tradition where monsters and treasures did not provide XP but the players received XP upon reaching certain goals within an adventure.

Anyway, I am looking to get a campaign going as ACK really reads great. Now as I was not part of the original DnD story I do not own any of the original modules. Often I read about B1 and B2 and I have started to Google them. I can’t check as RPG now is down, but are these “old” adventures still available? Are there “Modern” alternatives that are easy to use with ACK? Maybe there is an article or blog out there especially for this?

I also never created a campaign fully from 0 and I find it surprisingly challenging. I am torturing Hexographer right now. All the population calculations and trade routes etc seem a bit much work at first glance. I am trying to understand the value of that information as all worlds I have played and GMed in where never as detailed in this regard.

I guess that`s it for now, any replies and insights are very welcome!

Hey Chaosmeister! Thanks for checking out ACKS. The wiki [<http://campaignwiki.org/wiki/LinksToWisdom/HomePage>] is definitely a good read. I'll take a few minutes here to address your points directly.

It seems to me that the main thing you are missing is the idea of the "sandbox". ACKS is built for "sandbox play", meaning that the Judge creates the world and the PCs map their own course through it. This is wildly different from "story play," where the Judge creates the story and the PCs proceed through it. Dragonlance, Ravenloft, and many more modern modules are all examples of story play. Keep on the Borderlands is an example of a sandbox module.

"XP for treasure is one example that springs to my mind was the first where I thought "WTF?". I will try to roll with it even though it goes against my instincts. I come from a tradition where monsters and treasures did not provide XP but the players received XP upon reaching certain goals within an adventure."

The reason PCs earn XP for treasure is that a sandbox campaign needs an objective standard by which to reward the PCs. It can't be a subjective standard ("story awards" set by the Judge) because that takes away the player's agency to choose their path. Gold serves as a useful standard because the default motivation of most adventurers throughout fiction and history has been "fame, fortune, and power". Achilles, Beowulf, Conan, and Fafhrd would all be happy to earn a chest filled with jewels and gold.

The "XP for treasure" system has two other benefits that make it an especially good choice. First, treasure tends to be deposited in hard-to-get, well-guarded places that demand skill and cunning to reach. It thus serves as a way of objectively measuring the player's resourcefulness and determination. If they managed to get to the 8th level of the Undercity and find the lost treasure of Ianna, they deserve the XP!

Second, using "XP for treasure" means that as characters become more powerful they will gather more resources. In a game like ACKS, which is built on the "rise to power" trope of Beowulf/Conan/Robin Hood/Theseus/etc., this is more than a happy coincidence, it's a necessity. A 9th level fighter is powerful enough to command respect, and rich enough to buy an army.

"I also never created a campaign fully from 0 and I find it surprisingly challenging. I am torturing Hexographer right now. All the population calculations and trade routes etc seem a bit much work at first glance. I am trying to understand the value of that information as all worlds I have played and GMed in where never as detailed in this regard."

The reason to do this is to create the sandbox that your players can play through. That said, in the early stages of your campaign, the playable area of the sandbox is going to be very small - a small town, a dungeon, and that's it. You could certainly just start your campaign with, e.g., the Keep and the Caves of Chaos. (I did!) Or, if this is your first time running an old school game, you might want to start with a pre-existing sandbox. Rob Conley's Points of Light is a good choice in this regard, as are the many old school sandboxes published on the web.

[theskyfullofdust added some links to additional articles on the topic by Alex]

<http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/columns/checkfortraps/7797...>

<http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/columns/checkfortraps/7864...>

<http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/columns/checkfortraps/7928...>

Transitioning from B/X to ACKS...

<http://autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/transitioning-bx-acks>

June 01, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Maxwell Luther wrote:

Well, last night was the clincher. I was using so much stuff from ACKS (including the mortal wound tables which resulted in an Elf getting stabbed in the junk in by a Kobold with a dung covered point-ed stick) in my B/X game, we just decided to switch over completely instead of waiting until the next level.

My only problem is trying to absorb the subtle changes to the B/X system. What should I particularly look out for?

- 1) The biggest change is Armor Class - ACKS AC is 9-B/X AC.
- 2) The second biggest change is thief skills, opening doors, finding secret doors, etc. converting to a 1d20 throw. It is helpful to have everyone spend a few minutes writing down their new values. ("Ok, my Str 14 fighter opens doors on 14+...")
- 3) Characters will need to pick proficiencies. I'd recommend asking players to do it based on who their characters have been in the game so far, rather than doing it power-game style from scratch.
- 4) Mages who are using BECMI spell books will probably have more spells in their book than ACKS permits. You might wish to allow them to either stick with "large spell books + memorization" or switch over to "smaller spell repertoire + freecasting" as per ACKS.
- 5) Fighters can get grumpy about swords and other favorite weapons being reduced to 1d6 damage. It's helpful to explain how Cleaving and Fighter Damage Bonuses work at the same time as you re-do the weapon damage for that reason.

You do not add your attribute bonus to proficiency throws, no, unless specifically noted. This was done to avoid making ability scores more important than character level. (E.g. we wanted a thief with Dex 13 to still be useful and playable in a party with a thief of Dex 18). Some people house-rule this. It doesn't break anything, it just adds a bit of power creep. Otherwise, sounds like everything is well in hand -- good luck!!

Honor/Shame and Levels

<http://autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/honorshame-and-levels>

July 04, 2012

Tag: **New Material**

DrPete wrote:

Hi all,

I've been thinking about honor based societies, and how they connect to the implied game world.

To be clear about what I mean, I'm not talking about what we tend to think of as personal honor, ie, a code of ethics, but rather something more like a reputation based society, one in which one is mostly concerned about not "losing face" as opposed to "being right" or being "good". Societies in which insulting someone is cause for a duel, or where people go to great lengths to have a good name or family name. In Norse epics, people would hunt down and kill enemies for calling them names, and in Japan, Samurai would commit suicide over loss of face. This kind of thing...

I sense that some of this is present in the rules: reputation effecting hirelings, character "upkeep" depending on level (high level characters must maintain a more elaborate lifestyle) attracting followers at high level, the presence of bards, and even the need to return, alive, from an adventure to gain xp. There was also a discussion earlier about temporally powerful people being high level.

To bring this idea more to the fore, could one think of level as a sort of reputation level, with the understanding that character power lives and dies by a combination of skill and reputation, and that this is so ingrained in characters that they need to boost this reputation in order to gain levels? Bards could then do things like spread your story around for bonus party xp, maybe...

Another interesting avenue for this would be that having someone loudly and publicly insult your ability would risk you actually losing a level unless you did something about it. It's a rough idea, but I'm interested in hearing if it sparks anyone's interest.

Pete

Thank you for noting the difference between a code of ethics and a code of honor. Have you read "Honor: A History"? The author describes how the West has entirely lost the concept of honor. To the point where we have to explain what we mean in a way that Achilles or Beowulf never would have.

In any event, to address your questions/ideas. Throughout the design of ACKS we kept flirting with the idea of a separate Honor System, similar to that presented by David Cook in *Oriental Adventures*. Honor would modify henchmen loyalty, number of followers, level at which you get followers, and so on.

Ultimately, we did not include the system, for several reasons. First, we already had several game mechanics affecting those areas: class, level, proficiencies, and Charisma. Second, it would have required hard-coding a certain view of honor that made the game less flexible (e.g. Bushido, Chivalry, Stoic, etc). Third, it seemed to clash with the implicit assumption in the game that your honor improved with your classes.

If you are interested, here are the rules we developed, but did not adopt:

Reputation

Each time an adventurer advances in level, he earns a **reputation** based on his deeds. To keep track of his adventurer's reputation, the player should record the following information:

- The adventurer's most impressive exploit during the preceding level
- The adventurer's alignment when he gained his level
- The location where the adventurer gained his level (usually the settlement where he returned with treasure and trophies). This is the **source** of the adventurer's reputation.

The adventurer will be well-known for his exploits in a local region around the source, and will be somewhat known throughout regions neighboring the local region. The Regional Reputation Table shows the extent to which an adventurer's reputation will extend. For instance, a 3rd level fighter who saved a village from goblins will be well known as a "goblin-slayer" throughout the village, and somewhat known throughout the neighboring barony.

Regional Reputation Table

Class Level	Well Known Throughout	Somewhat Known Throughout
1st	Own household	-
2nd	Local manor or hamlet	Neighboring small barony or village
3rd	Local tiny barony or village	Neighboring barony or large village
4th	Local small barony or large village	Neighboring march or town
5th	Local barony or large village	Neighboring county
6th	Local march or town	Neighboring large county
7th	Local county	Neighboring small duchy or big city
8th	Local large county	Neighboring duchy
9th	Local small duchy	Neighboring province or principality
10th	Local duchy	Neighboring small kingdom or large province
11th	Local province or principality	Neighboring kingdom
12th	Local small kingdom or large province	Entire continent
13th	Local kingdom	Entire known world
14th	Entire continent	Neighboring worlds

When an adventurer reaches 4th level his expanding reputation begins to affect his reaction rolls in regions where he is well known. Well-known lawful adventurers gain a +1 bonus to their reaction rolls with lawful and neutral creatures, but a -1 penalty with chaotic creatures. Well-known chaotic adventurers gain a +1 bonus with chaotic creatures, but a -1 penalty with lawful and neutral creatures. Neutral adventurers gain a +1 bonus to their reaction rolls in non-hostile circumstances (such as approaching under a flag of truce) and a -1 penalty in hostile circumstances (e.g. smashing in a dungeon door).

When an adventurer reaches 9th level, the effect of his reputation increases again. Where he is well-known, he now has a +2/-2 modifier to reaction rolls. NPC allies gain a +1 bonus to morale rolls, while NPC opponents suffer a -1 penalty to morale rolls. In regions where he is only somewhat known, he exerts a +1/-1 modifier to reaction rolls.

At 14th level, the adventurer's reputation is such that he has a +3/-3 modifier to reaction rolls and +2/-2 modifier to morale rolls where he is well-known. In regions where he is only somewhat known, he exerts a +2/-2 modifier to reaction rolls and a +1/-1 modifier on morale rolls.

These effects are summarized on the Effects of Reputation Table.

Effects of Reputation Table		
Class Level	If Well Known	If Somewhat Known
1st	-	-
2nd	-	-
3rd	-	-
4th	+1/-1 reaction roll modifier	-
5th	+1/-1 reaction roll modifier	-
6th	+1/-1 reaction roll modifier	-
7th	+1/-1 reaction roll modifier	-
8th	+1/-1 reaction roll modifier	-
9th	+2/-2 reaction roll modifier, +1/-1 morale modifier	+1/-1 reaction roll modifier
10th	+2/-2 reaction roll modifier, +1/-1 morale modifier	+1/-1 reaction roll modifier
11th	+2/-2 reaction roll modifier, +1/-1 morale modifier	+1/-1 reaction roll modifier
12th	+2/-2 reaction roll modifier, +1/-1 morale modifier	+1/-1 reaction roll modifier
13th	+2/-2 reaction roll modifier, +1/-1 morale modifier	+1/-1 reaction roll modifier
14th	+3/-3 reaction roll modifier, +2/-2 morale modifier	+2/-2 reaction roll modifier, +1/-1 morale modifier

EXAMPLE: Marcus, a Lawful fighter, earns his 4th level when he returns to a local Jutland baron's castle with the head of minotaur. Throughout the barony he becomes known as the Bull-slayer. In this region he is well-known, and has a +1 to reaction rolls with Lawful and Neutral NPCs, but -1 to reaction rolls with Chaotic NPCs. When he travels to a neighboring barony he is somewhat known, and not known at all in a distant kingdom. Years later, Marcus earns his 13th level of experience when he slays the great dragon Aisoth and returns with its treasure to the city of Arganos. He is now known throughout the entire kingdom of Southern Argollë, where he has +2 to reaction rolls with Lawful and Neutral NPCs and -2 with Chaotic NPCs. He is so famous that he is somewhat known worldwide, where he gains +1 to reaction rolls with Lawfuls and Neutrals and -1 with Chaotics.

Conflicting Reputations

If an adventurer travels extensively and changes his alignment during his career, it's possible he might have conflicting reputations in different regions. Whenever conflicting reputations overlap in the same regions, apply the reputation earned at a higher level. But if the conflicting reputations do not overlap, apply the reputation of the region the adventurer is actually in.

EXAMPLE: Myalgar was a Lawful mage when he adventured in his home barony in Southern Argollë. He reached 5th level, so he is known and beloved by the peasants there and feared by the monsters (+1 / -1). Thereafter, Myalgar traveled to distant Kemesh, where he became corrupted by its black magic. At 8th level, the now Chaotic Myalgar is well-known in his county of Kemesh as a sinister sorcerer. When he returns to his home region in Southern Argollë, the residents are unaware of his sinister reputation in Kemesh, and still interact with him on the basis of his reputation there, as a Lawful 5th level mage. Had Myalgar reached 12th level in Kemesh, he would be somewhat known throughout the entire continent, so this would override his earlier reputation. The peasants would tremble in fear at the horror their benefactor had become.

Staying Anonymous

Not every character wishes to have a reputation. Assassins or thieves, for instance, may wish to stay out of the limelight, as might chaotic characters who want to be able to move safely in lawful lands. Other times adventurers may wish to develop a reputation, but fail to do so. Whether or not a character develops a reputation or remains an unknown must be determined by the GM based on the total circumstances of the adventurer's exploits. The following five questions should be asked:

- Does the adventurer have a notable appearance, weapon, banner, or symbol?
- Has the adventurer been seen in the company of other adventurers who do have a reputation?
- Have NPCs witnessed the adventurer performing noteworthy deeds?
- Have other PCs told tales of the adventurer's deeds?
- Has the adventurer publicly deposited, spent, donated, or squandered a significant amount of gold relative to his level?

If no more than two of these questions are answered affirmatively, the adventurer has stayed anonymous. But if at least three of these questions are answered in the affirmative, then the adventurer should gain a reputation.

EXAMPLE: Viktir, a Neutral thief, has just earned his 4th level of experience after raiding the dreaded Death Crypt. He wants to avoid gaining a reputation. He dresses plainly and avoids extravagance and has buried his treasure outside of town. Unfortunately, the NPC mage who hired the party knows they succeeded, so there is a witness. And Viktir has been seen in the company of his party members, who are wandering town letting jewels splash like coppers and bragging about their “unstoppable burglar.” Despite his efforts to lie low, Viktir gains a reputation.

ACKS Lethality

<http://autarch.co/forum/acks-lethality-0>

February 25, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Jim Williams wrote:

I purchased ACKS this past week and I have already judged an ACKS session. I was also impressed enough on my read-through to become a Player's Companion Kickstarter. Alex, Tavis, Greg, and all of the other folks involved with the product should be truly proud of their accomplishment.

This post can be seen as a sort of response to Alex's post in this thread but it's really an open question that I'm interested in discussing and is based my own desire to find a solution that will allow me to share my enjoyment of this game with my players.

How can a group realize the assumption of reaching 9th-14th level?

Character mortality is shockingly high to the point where one of my players asked tongue-in-cheek how the hobby ever got off the ground. This is anecdotal, but I'm pretty confident that my group has averaged out to a little more than one character death every combat between ACKS and BC D&D sessions. Character ascendancy is practically a pipe dream.

I already have my own ideas for weighting the odds a little more in the favor of my players but this is an honest effort to get feedback on how other folks run or play their games. Neither I nor my players are looking for a "We Win" button. However, I do want to find a way reduce that near certainty of character death once initiative is rolled.

Some quick personal gaming background...I started playing 30 years ago with Holmes D&D and moved onto AD&D shortly after that. AD&D is where I spent the majority of my play time but it's been a while. I have since played 2nd, 3rd, and 4th editions of D&D and a few other games on and off over the years - meaning short term campaigns of maybe a few weeks in length sometimes with years in between. I am almost always the GM. I have a large collection of roleplaying games across a wide range of genres and mechanical family trees. In short, I'm probably an academic gamer with more theoretical knowledge than recent practical experience.

Thanks for your time folks and good gaming!

Hello! Great question.

In the original Auran Empire campaign, we used maximum hit points and 5 starting PCs per player, of which there were 5: Marcus (Fighter), Quintus (Mage), Decimus (Cleric), Calvus (Assassin), Dalwhynnie (Elf), for 5 players. Of these, Marcus and Quintus survived to make it to 14th level. Calvus died and was replaced with Balbus (Cleric), who made it to 14th level. Decimus died and was replaced with Corwin, who was replaced with Cork, who was replaced with Morne, who was replaced by Viktir, who made it to 14th level. You can read my actual play reports here:

<http://www.dragonsfoot.org/forums/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=36943>

After three sessions, roughly 18 hours of play, the party had suffered 18 casualties: Colvus, Decimus, Cork, Massimius, and 14 mercenaries. Session 2 remains the worst session to date, with 2 dead player characters and 4 dead retainers, for a staggering 55% fatality rate. Session 3 represented the first session where the party didn't lose a player-character, though they did lose 4 mercenaries. Having since run and played in many other ACKs 1st-3rd level trips, these casualty levels seem to be about standard, e.g. brutal.

For 1st level PCs, the keys to survival are (1) hiring as many henchmen and mercenaries as possible, (2) using formations with 2nd rank spearmen and lots of use of bows, oil, etc, (3) timely and effective use of sleep and charm person, and (4) running away a lot.

That said, lethality decreases dramatically once level 2 is reached, and dramatically again once level 3 is reached. It stays constant until about level 7, when Clerics get their 5th level spells, when it becomes close to non-existent except from egregious screw-ups (party wipes). Basically, not every character will make it to 2nd level, and some will not make it to 4th level, but virtually every character who makes it 4th level can make it to 7th level, and virtually every character who makes it to 7th can make it to 14th.

If "Saving Private Ryan" style casualties are not your cup of tea (and it's not some peoples') I'd suggest one of the following:

1. Just start at 2nd, 3rd, or 4th level. There are rules at the end of ACKS for this.
2. Have the early adventures be milk runs rather than meat grinders. Baby dragons, bandits with a bounty, etc.
3. Start the PCs as the henchmen of a powerful PC who helps them on the first session, when they get their major XP chunk. (This is the computer RPG way to do it - a tutorial with a mentor!)

The Pricing of Magic Items in ACKS

<http://www.autarch.co/blog/pricing-magic-items-acks>

Jul 09, 2012 02:02 PM

Tag: **Insight**

Alex wrote:

Why are magic items so expensive to make in ACKS, and why is it so hard to sell them? That's the topic of today's blog post.

When veterans of other fantasy games, particularly D&D 4th Edition and Pathfinder, begin to play Adventurer Conqueror King System, almost all of them express shock at how expensive and time consuming it is to create magic items. A simple *potion of healing*, for instance, requires 500gp and 1 week to create. The exact same item in D&D 3.5 requires 50gp and 1 day. Magical research in ACKS is 10x as expensive!

After noting the expense of magic items, players usually begin to scheme about *selling* magic items. They presume that, since magic items are expensive to create, they must be quite valuable to everyone, and therefore command a high sale price on the open market. This betrays a misunderstanding of "cost" and "value" which will be further elaborated below.

Why Magic Items Must Be Expensive

Before delving into economics, however, let's start by explaining **why** magic items are so expensive to create in ACKS. The high cost of magical research was a very deliberate decision, necessary to create a particular type of campaign setting.

First, ACKS aims at campaign settings wherein the majority of magic items are found as treasure while adventuring. If ACKS allowed magic items to be created cheaply, most magic items would be created on commission in town. A *sword +1* wouldn't be something you *find* on an adventure - it would be something you *bought* in order to *bring* on an adventure.

Second, ACKS aims at campaign settings which approximate in tone, technology, and economics the historical world of Late Antiquity. Obviously, magic items were not cheaply available for sale in ancient Constantinople. *Potions of growth* were not issued to the Legions before battles in Gaul.

Third, ACKS aims at campaign settings in which pitched battles like Cannae and Agincourt can occur. Cheaply available magic items make this an impossibility. If each mage's apprentice can be issued a cheaply-manufactured *wand of fireballs*, warfare will resemble the Somme 1916, not Agincourt.

Now, if you disagree with these design goals, then ACKS' magic item pricing is wrong. For example, if you want magic-as-technology, like in Eberron, then ACKS' magical research is mispriced. If you want your setting's fantasy battles to feel like 21st century special forces engagements, with warriors in *invisibility* cloaks guiding in aerial golems carrying *wands of fireballs* to destroy orc insurgents, then ACKS' magical research is mispriced. But then there are already games that are quite good at simulating such settings, whereas ACKS is an overall suboptimal choice for that brand of fantasy.

On the other hand, if you're tired of having to justify why all your world's cities aren't lit by *continual light* spells, then ACKS is the right choice.

Why The Expense of Magic Items Makes Them Unviable as Goods

Given that magic items in ACKS are expensive to create, why aren't they valuable economic goods? The reason lies in the often-misunderstood differential between *cost* and *value*. Cost is what it requires to produce a good. Value is what someone is willing to pay for the good. As an example, let's say that I'm an attorney who earns \$100 per hour. Let's say that instead of doing client work, I decided to spend 8 hours sketching a drawing of my office. Being an attorney and not an artist, my drawing is not very good. Yet its economic cost to produce was the loss of 8 hours of my time, e.g. (8 x \$100) \$800.

Like my hypothetical office sketch, magic items in ACKS cost more than their value. Consider the humble *+1 sword*, which requires 5,000gp and one month to create. In the hands of a hireling, the difference between wielding a sword, and wielding a *+1 sword*, is identical to the difference between being a normal man (Attack throw 11, damage by weapon) and being a 1st level fighter (attack throw 10, damage by weapon +1).

The cost to buy a 0th level slave-soldier in ACKS is 415gp. The cost to buy a 1st level slave soldier in ACKS is 830gp, for a net difference of 415gp. An overlord might be willing to pay 415gp for a *sword +1*, the difference between the cost of a 0th level slave-soldier and a 1st level slave-soldier, but he wouldn't be willing to pay 5000gp. For that price he could have 6 more 1st level slave-soldiers!

Why, then, might a *sword +1* ever be created? Only a few reasons would justify its production:

1. Conspicuous consumption. A lord might commission a magic sword in order to show off his wealth. Such a sword would almost certainly be decorated lavishly and bear his house sigil and other markings.
2. Need to fight enchanted monsters. An adventurer facing, e.g., undead might need a magical weapon in order to harm them.

-
3. Performance at any price. A fighter of sufficient means, taking extreme personal risk, might be willing to pay virtually any price for an additional edge.

Now, consider the *sword +1* extracted from a dungeon. It is of uncertain purview and ownership history. While finely decorated, it is unlikely to have precisely the decorations that a lord would seek to expend resources on. A lord might buy such an item as a curio -- "Ah, yes, Fritz, this is that blade that was found in the Ruins of Zahar! Charming work, what?" -- but he would pay much less than he'd pay for a commissioned item of his choice.

Other adventurers might buy the sword - if they don't have one of their own, and if they have spare cash, and if they trust their rivals enough to do business with them. This is a fairly small market, and an inefficient one. The likelihood of another adventurer of around the same level being in the same area and needing the specific item is low.

Finally, a mage's guild or other broker might buy the item at a steep discount, hoping to resell it later when there is an urgent need for it. Perhaps the mage's guild recognizes that the ancient sword belongs to a particular, distant noble house that would pay for it. They might buy it from the adventurers at a deep discount, absorb the cost of identification, authenticating, and transport, and then sell it at a mark-up.

But in all of these cases, no one is buying the magic item because of the value of its bonus, *per se*.

The Industrial Revolution Will Not Be Magickified

It's worth remembering that the ancient engineer Hero of Alexandria invented the steam engine *two thousand years* before the industrial revolution. The engine was considered to have no practical use. Slave labor was so abundant in the ancient world that there was no economic need to industrialize - why build machines when human labor is cheap and plentiful? A steam engine might be a fascinating toy for a conqueror, but it would never become a capital good in the age of Rome. Magic items in ACKS fill the same niche. They are simply too expensive to create to be effective in changing their world.

This does raise the question of "where did the magic items in the dungeons come from"? The answer will, of course, depend on the Judge's campaign setting, but in general ACKS assumes that conditions were different in earlier days. Many campaign settings will assume that magic was stronger "in the old days" (a common trope seen in *A Game of Thrones*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Conan*, *The First Law*, and more) and thus magic items *were* cost-effective to make. Another assumption might be that long ago there was an industrio-magic revolution, with mass production techniques. It may be that the ancient items were created by the gods. Or perhaps the items are simply detritus of generations of adventurers. Whatever the case, it's not happening anymore.

Spell Points for ACKS

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/spell-points-acks>

September 21, 2012

Tag: **New Material**

Alex wrote:

In the Auran Empire campaign setting, we presume the existence of a "psychic energy" which is used to channel and fuel spells. Clerics and mages use their personal psychic energies to initiate and channel spells, while the actual psychic energy to fuel the spell comes from gods (clerics) or latent elemental energy (mages) respectively. The system ties into the Divine Power section in Chapter 7 of ACKS, which shows how much "psychic energy" a person generates when sacrificed, or per week of devotion.

On this basis, I was able to put together a spell point system for ACKS, for those of you who enjoy such things:

Spell Level: Cost in Spell Points

1st Level:	1 point
2nd Level:	3 points
3rd Level:	6 points
4th Level:	10 points
5th Level:	15 points
6th Level:	21 points

Cleric Spell Points Per Level

1st	0
2nd	1
3rd	2
4th	5
5th	8
6th	25
7th	45
8th	60
9th	80
10th	95
11th	115
12th	130
13th	135
14th	160

Mage	Spell Points Per Level
1st	1
2nd	2
3rd	5
4th	8
5th	14
6th	20
7th	31 (or round to 30)
8th	44 (or round to 45)
9th	65
10th	90
11th	112
12th	151 (or round to 150)
13th	157 (or round to 160)
14th	188 (or round to 190)

ACKS With a Small Party

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/acks-small-party>

November 19, 2012

Tag: Q&A

golan2072 wrote:

I am thinking about running an ACKS campaign for my fiancée, who has already played Shadowrun, D&D 3.0E and BFRPG in the past. However, I'm not sure if I can get more players for this particular game for various reasons.

So how well would ACKS work for a "single player" campaign (i.e. 1 player and 1 Judge)? I was thinking about letting her play a charismatic character and let her start at level 3 with several henchmen...

Yes, I did. I ran a campaign for my wife. She played a 4th level Elven Spellsword.

Your idea of having your fiancée start with henchmen is a good one and works well, as long as she has the play experience to juggle multiple characters. My wife enjoys being a "lone wolf" so I went with magic items instead of henchmen.

I deliberately equipped her character with a magic sword, a rope of climbing, and elven cloak and boots. Her spell selection was charm person, detect magic, sleep, knock, and levitate. The cloak and boots allowed her to move through dungeons commando-style, while the rope of climbing allowed her to navigate through environments that would otherwise have been impassable without a thief. The spells let her find magic items, recruit minions, and get through locked portals and so on.

She then assaulted the Caves of Chaos... it was very Batmanesque, as she maneuvered invisibly and inaudibly, unleashed sleep spells, cleaved through foes, then fall back to strike again later.

Impact of Demographics on Mortal Healing

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/impact-demographics-mortal-healing>

November 23, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tom Hudson wrote:

I just looked up something I hadn't bothered computing before: Restore Life & Limb is 5th level. Class demographics and milieu size combine to make it hard to get.

A "standard" regional map is 600 hexes, 50% wilderness; I'll assume 25% borderland and 25% civilized.

- *Wilderness: 300hx, 60 families/hex = 18000 families*
- *Borderland: 150hx, 180 families/hex = 27000 families*
- *Civilized: 150hx, 300 families/hex = 45000 families*

Going with 300hx Wilderness / 100hx Borderland / 200hx Civilized only seems to increase population 10%, so adding another city "behind the lines" won't save you.

It's not entirely clear when I read the rules, but urban settlements may push the above numbers up 10%. I'm not quite settled on how to handle urban populations, anyhow; I'll poke that beehive in another post.

On the map there are:

- *9th level: 450000 / 60000 = 7.5 NPCs*
- *10th level: 450000 / 160000 = 2.8 NPCs*
- *11th level: 450000 / 450000 = 1 NPC*

And assumptions on class distribution I think I've seen in Autarch materials somewhere are somewhere around:

- *50% fighter*
- *20% cleric*
- *20% thief*
- *10% mage*

You'd better hope that of the 3 clerics of appropriate levels, one is of a compatible religion in a place you can get to safely; remember that the standard region is 180x240 miles and so you're probably 50 miles (2 days) away from the closest of them.

(Or hope that your Judge is using the Priestess class from the Player's Companion, in which case you only need a 7th level caster, and there are possibly another 8 candidates. (Math: 10x as many 7th+8th as there are 9th, 1/5th are Clerical, and optimistically assume about half of NPCs in Clerical classes are Priestesses.))

I think all my sandbox designs are a little too far away from a city, and perhaps have too many ongoing religious conflicts, for expected mid-level play.

Tom, your analysis here is largely spot-on. The intent is that Restore Life and Limb is generally not available to most people in most locations of the game world.

The expected pacing of ACKS is very much one where between adventures the PCs have to travel back to civilization if they want to get a Restore Life and Limb. This, combined with the resting period after the spell is cast, and / or recuperating from wounds in general, tends to mean that adventurers go on 1 adventurer per month or so, and means that mid- to high-level adventurers will age 3-5 years over the course of leveling up (4 sessions/level x 8 levels x 1 month/session). That in turn creates time for alchemy, crafting, stronghold building, and so on. This was very deliberate, after bad experiences in 3.5 where PCs could go from 1st to 10th level in a season.

Do note that a 7th level Cleric can cast Restore Life and Limb (he'll get 1 5th level spell per day), so it's not quite as dire as you assume.

Making Arcane Characters More Powerful?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/making-arcane-characters-more-powerful>

December 08, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

Yeah, yeah, I know what you are thinking.

But this isn't that.

In my campaign setting, there is a reason that magic works the way it does (ala D&D standard). A big part of that revolves around the nature of magic being irrevocably altered by a catastrophe called the Sundering. Before that event, magic was much more powerful and sweeping in scope.

Now, this is just window dressing to the world, but the pcs have recently traveled to another world...a world where this never happened. As such, by my cosmology, arcane magic should be much stronger.

Given my druthers, I'd love it if there were some effect based system for OSR magic out there, but I've never seen one. Other than spell points, or additional slots, or other effect, there aren't many ways I can think of to change the magic system to reflect the fluff (not without literally tearing it out and replacing it with something completely different, which I've never really seen attempted in the old school days).

For PCs, I'll probably just let them maybe have an extra slot per spell level or something to represent their unfamiliarity with the new power they have coursing around them.

But is there any other way? Does anyone know of anything I could do, or perhaps have some suggestions beyond spell points or more slots or increased caster level? Are there easily usable OSR friendly alt-casting methods I don't know of?

I do realize that the spell builder rules could kind of be used for what I'm thinking about, but frankly, I feel that the intense math would slow me and my players down too much for spells cast on the fly.

The strength of arcane magic could be analyzed as follows:

1. Who can do magic?
2. How often can they do it?
3. What can they do with it?
4. What are the limits of what can magic do?
5. How long does it take to do it?

Who: In ACKS, only mages and related classes can do magic. If magic is more powerful, perhaps everyone has access to some minor degree of magic.

Frequency: In ACKS, mages are strictly limited in the number of spells they can cast per day. If magic is more powerful, perhaps these frequency caps are greater. Or perhaps the magic is *always* available, but access it comes at a risk - lose 1d3 hp per spell level, or lose 1 point of CON temporarily per spell level, or make a saving throw to avoid being stunned.

Breadth: In ACKS, mages have to work very hard to keep their spells in their repertoire. In an alternative world, perhaps mages can cast any spell they've got in their spellbooks.

Limits: In ACKS spells greater than 6th level are Ritual magic. In an alternative world, perhaps 7th-9th level spells are standard spells, and ritual magic exists at the 10th-12th level.

Length: In ACKS, all spells take 1 round, except for occasional spells noted as taking 1 turn and ritual spells that take weeks. If magic were more powerful, perhaps most spells would take 1 action - meaning you wouldn't need to declare in advance, could move and cast, etc. Perhaps 10 minute casting time because one round, and ritual casting time becomes 10 minutes.

Help! I Keep Killing the Party

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/help-i-keep-killing-party>

March 05, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Bascaria wrote:

Not sure which forum to put this in, so I've gone with AtA, as it seems the most advice-oriented, although I am definitely interested in everybody's viewpoints.

(Also, note to the members of my group--Knightware, Saturday players--who read this forum, please be so kind as to avoid this thread.)

So here's the problem: after about 6 months of play (~8 hours every other week), the highest level member of the party is... 2. For a few sessions, there was a lvl 3 guy, but he was unceremoniously turned to stone this past weekend, so back to level one he goes.

The group consists of one player who has been playing since the days of editions whose nomenclature is far beyond my ken, and then a bunch of relative newcomers to role-playing games (all of us having started with 3rd edition of the game-which-must-not-be-named (TM) or later). I've run several campaigns of 3.5 and Pathfinder with a fair bit of success, and the group is excited about ACKS, constant deaths notwithstanding.

They like the heightened sense of danger in relation to later editions, and I like that the world obeys rules according to it's own logic, rather than the party's power. In Pathfinder, for example, if you are wandering around, then the game is only going to throw level appropriate encounters at you. In ACKS, this is most definitely not the case. This is good; everyone likes it. The party has learned to carefully select which wilderness encounters to engage in, and is figuring out that things are much safer back nearer the civilized territories than out in the borderlands.

However, even sticking to civilized regions and not going any further than the first level of the dungeons and going through them very carefully, nobody has made it past 3rd level (and only 1 player made it to 3rd level). I generate my dungeons according to the rulebook. Draw map, roll to find out the contents of the rooms, then assign the contents to rooms in a way that makes internal sense. I generate random wilderness and wandering monster encounters according to the rulebooks, but everybody keeps dying, and people are starting to get a little tired of it.

I don't want to turn on easy mode and start filtering out all level-inappropriate encounters, save-or-die effects, or the like, nor do I want for my monsters--the intelligent ones at least--to start behaving like idiots. However, I also want the players to get to higher levels.

One of the biggest problems we've come up against is the dearth of henchmen. If everyone could get a full coterie of henchmen then they would be doing much better, but they are mostly wandering around Class VI and the occasional Class V market, which means d2 0th level men and a small % chance of a single level 1 henchman available for hire. I guess we could spend 6 months wandering from barony to barony, fastidiously avoiding all encounters, until enough henchmen can be acquired, but that hardly seems like the right solution.

Clearly, though, people are reaching higher levels in ACKS campaigns out there in the world, so we must be doing something wrong.

So, I'm hoping to solicit advice on:

(1) Things I can do to help the party reach higher levels which are not simply "go easier on them." If we wanted to play an /easy/ game, I'd run more Pathfinder.

(2) Things I might be doing incorrectly that would improperly increase the lethality of the system.

(3) Advice I could give to the players to help them keep themselves alive.

(4) Anything else that is relevant that I don't know enough to ask.

Thank you, everyone!

P.S.: Telling them to spend frivolously more isn't useful. They already spend almost all their money frivolously anyways (that which doesn't go towards buying the best mundane equipment and hiring henchmen is drunk/gambled/donated away). But even that gets them a thousand XP or so with a starting character, but then he dies and they are back to 0 with the next.

Hi Bascaria! First off, I appreciate your players' enthusiasm for ACKS. The fact that they've stuck to it despite such fatalities is impressive. Here are a few thoughts.

1. The lack of a Class IV or Class III city within reasonable proximity to the PCs is hurting them. With access to a decent-sized city, the PCs can hire henchmen, purchase scrolls, and, most importantly, buy restore-life-and-limb spells for fallen or maimed comrades. I don't think I have ever run an ACKS campaign when there wasn't at least a Class IV city within a week's ride.

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2. Numbers in the party. How large is your group, and how many characters do they enter the dungeon with? ACKS assumes old-school sized parties of about 6 PCs accompanied by henchmen. My play group here in my home campaign rolls into dungeons with about 12 characters plus a couple war dogs, with another set of mercenaries up top to guard the pack animals and watch over the treasure as its hauled to the surface.
 3. Availability of key spells. Do you have a mage capable of casting sleep? Sleep is the tactical nuke of lower-level play. Most of the time if there's no mage, or he doesn't have sleep, my players will invest the time and money in hiring a mage and/or learning the spell.
 4. Evading wilderness encounters. Do they evade every wilderness encounter they can? Do they flee from the ones they fail to evade? Wilderness encounters are deadly for low-level characters. In my home campaigns, my players evade or flee from 75-90% of their wilderness encounters, even as high as 4th or 5th level.
 5. Starting Hit Points. I personally always allow PCs to have maximum starting hp at first level. I know some of the old-school Taliban frown on this practice, which is why I made it an optional rule, but I think ACKS is hard enough even with max hp at level 1.
 6. Battle tactics. At low level play, battle tactics become very important. Generally the group should have 2 heavily-armored fighters with weapon and shield in a front rank; 2 fighter-types with spears in the second rank; mages and clerics in third rank; and then thieves with bows and slings in a rear rank. I apologize if this is self-evident, but I've seen many players used to 3.5-style tactics fail to use these tactics.
 7. Insufficient Treasure. In your campaign notes above, you didn't mention whether you were double-checking that random treasure generation equated to 5x monster XP. That's a very important step. Too little treasure will leave your PCs unable to advance no matter how skilled they are.
 8. Bad luck on the magic item tables. Over the life of a campaign, purely random treasure distribution will tend to even out. But because of the above-average lethality of low-level play, the treasure that a party finds at their early levels can have a disproportionate effect on the game. Each class has a couple key items that make a huge difference at low levels, even though they become much less important at high level. Knowing this, I tend to hand place them scattered about. Keep in mind that the treasure tables are there to guide you, not handcuff you.

The key items are elven cloak & boots (thieves); staff of healing (cleric); magic sword, magic armor / shield (fighter); wand of paralyzation (mage). If you look at classic old-school modules, like B2 Keep on the Borderlands, you'll see that Gary Gygax systematically places these items.

What I'd start with, if I were you, would be to announce that the treasure flowing into the realm has caused one of your Class V cities to develop into a Class IV city, and that opportunity for adventure is attracting enough henchmen and mercenaries that it counts as Class III for NPC and spell availability purposes. This is entirely reasonable and sensible within the context of an ACKS world. (Again, the guidelines are there to help you, not handcuff you). That will let the PCs buff up with lots of hirelings, which should help them survive the challenges ahead.

Limiting Party Size

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/limiting-party-size>

April 24, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

Ok, so my players like Henchmen. Like...really like Henchmen. Back in the day, it wasn't such a big deal. But now, they are a freaking mercenary company.

Some of the players are even starting to get annoyed at some of the others who bring their 5+ henchmen along on every adventure. But no one actually says or does anything about it.

But what does end up happening is that none of the modules I have really work for the party. None of them are designed, even at the height of old school 'parties as military units', 'bring all you can' style early adventures, with this many characters in mind. They have so much force they can bring to bare that they slice through anything at or around their level and blast away even higher level challenges. Short of Grimtooth style death traps that kill off half the party, what can I do to encourage them to bring fewer characters along?

I suppose I should add that I'm hesitant to simply force the issue... I do understand the desire to bring as many people as you can... I mean, if I were one of their characters it's what I would do. So I guess I'm looking for in game solutions rather than simply saying, OOC, you can't do this any more.

You certainly don't want to force the issue, no. Here are a few thoughts (in general) about possible ramifications:

1. Part of the reason an adventuring party can enter and leave dungeons without being detected or chased down is because they are a small special-forces sized group. As a small group, it's easier to move without being detected. A large force is less likely to be able to do so. Lairs with even semi-alert guardians will certainly be more prepared should they be approached by a company of men. Finding the adventurer's base-camp where they rest is much easier when its a large group.
2. Minor wandering monsters might avoid a large party, but really powerful ones might be attracted to it.
3. Adventurers who create company-sized formations will attract considerably more attention from the local rulers, who may grow concerned over whether they are "planning something".

4. Don't neglect the limits on availability of armor, weapons, and food in settlements. Buying iron rations for 5 is usually easy in any settlement. Buying iron rations - or warhorse fodder - for 50 can strain the logistics.

5. Pay close attention to morale. Remember that each time a henchman levels and each time he suffers a calamity, that's a morale check. In small groups, it's easy to compensate for calamities with a steady supply of bonus cash and magic items, but with lots and lots of henchmen it's harder to keep each one loyal. And what happens to the ones that leave the party's service? Maybe they start a rival party. If enough fail at once, maybe they try to overthrow the party and take the treasure!

6. More henchmen will mean slower leveling. At some point the party will find that it has leveled so slowly that it begins to hit a painful plateau where they are tackling things that are too powerful for them, despite their numbers. (This has happened in some of my campaigns). They will naturally drop the number of henchmen they take, at that point.

But let me also suggest another way of thinking about it. If your party really likes henchmen, it's possible that they may be ready to move up to a more strategic level of play - and you should take advantage of that. I could see two possibilities.

1) An NPC approaches them with the opportunity to do a large-scale expedition into a dangerous wilderness. Once in the wilderness there'll be no easy way to get back to civilization, so they'll only have the food, water, supplies, treasure, and henchmen they bring with them. The henchmen become a non-renewable resource. You don't take all of them into the dungeon because you need some to guard the base-camp you establish in the wilderness, and so on. A module like Isle of Dread is ideal for this (and, in fact, served that purpose at around this point in the original Auran Empire campaign).

2) An NPC approaches them and asks if they'll hire into his service as a mercenary company. They can then be hired to do raids and battles on enemy towns, pillage and sack, fight engagements, and so on. This would let you introduce Domains at War mechanics.

3) An NPC offers to make one of the PCs his vassal with a minor noble title, if he will clear out location X in your sandbox. This gives them a settlement/base from which to operate for deeper forays, but will tie up many of their henchmen in guarding the base and the caravans back and forth and so on. It also raises the opportunity for mass combat.

Hope that's some helpful thoughts.

Using ACKS for a Historical Game?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/using-acks-historical-game>

April 26, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Kiero wrote:

Greetings!

Initially the mass combat system caught my attention, and now following subsequent discussion elsewhere, I'm interested in possibly using ACKS the whole of my game, not just the battle-scale stuff.

*For a little bit of background, what I'm intending is something set in the Hellenistic era (note this is not "mythic Greece" or even "ancient Greece", but the time after Alexander the Great), possibly around 300BC when lots was still in flux and every Macedonian aristocrat fancied themselves king of the known world. There's an explosion of Greek culture amid incessant warfare and intrigue - in other words an era ripe for roleplaying in. If you haven't already seen it, check out the (free) BRP game **Warlords of Alexander** which is a great sourcebook even if you don't use the system.*

The impact of this is that there's no magic, no monsters and no dungeons. I'm not interested in playing an alt-history game of "it's like the real world, but there's magic" and it would make a nice change from our usual pace to have a game without those usual tropes. Same goes for monsters, I'd hope the players might be a little more hesitant about wanton slaughter when their opponents are people. The third is my own personal preference, I can't stand dungeons and don't want to run them. Besides which, between raiding, trading and sellsword-ing there should be plenty of opportunities to make money.

Obviously what I'm planning is a pretty significant hack of the system, including dropping swathes of content. But I think the base of ACKS is robust enough to survive my ministrations.

Let's get on to some specifics that I'm curious about...

Classes and XP

Obviously, the Cleric and Mage classes are binned, along with anything else magic-oriented (and the non-human classes). That leaves me with Fighter, Thief, Assassin, Bard and Explorer. In the Homebrew forum, someone's done an Aristocrat, which seems to perfectly cover the D&D4e Warlord, which I was hoping to cater for.

How easy would it be to come up with an Expert/Scholar class, that covers things like philosophers, tutors, engineers and so on?

Onto a more fundamental question, the second part of this subsection: XP. I don't do bean counting and I refuse to get dragged into calculating, awarding and tracking the stuff. I like unified XP (ie it costs everyone the same amount to level up) precisely because it allows me to drop XP altogether and simply award levels at sensible-seeming intervals or junctures.

Given the rules for creating your own classes in the Player's Companion, and the rumored expertise over here, what would you need to do in order to balance the Thief, mechanically, with the Fighter? Ie bring them up to the same XP progression. Same goes, I guess with anything else built on the Thief frame that assumes faster level progression.

Or alternatively, could I let everyone simply make up their own class, but with the same XP progression as the budget?

Saves

Relatively brief one. I'm not a big fan of the old-style five saves; is there an easy way to map them to the three used later on, ie Reflex, Fortitude and Will? If there isn't I'll just have to suffer them, but it's worth seeing if anyone has considered it.

Treasure

Next one isn't a major one, just an admin/housekeeping sort of thing. I'd like to use period-appropriate notations of wealth; silver owls and Persian gold darics, significant wealth measured in talents of weight, that sort of thing. How easy would that be to do, and has anyone considered an exchange rate?

A gross simplification would be to just call gold pieces silver pieces and shift everything along a category, but I thought I'd check first.

Levels and rulers

I really like the demographics that have been built into assumptions about level and frequency. They're a good benchmark for how good a character is. I've got a strong inclination, for the purposes of this game to cap level advancement at 9th. Will that cause any problems?

Something that doesn't quite sit well with me, though, is the automatic assumption that a ruler is high level. The tyrant who hires a group of PCs might be 0th level, but connected and with the political nous to keep themselves in their post. I could easily see the sort of situation arise where a PC is individually able to squash some lord like a bug, but that lord is connected and has bodyguards and armies at their beck and call, who could ruin the PC's stuff if they tried it.

Am I going to break anything by severing this connection, ie a lord could be any level whatsoever, the captain of their guard might be a higher level than them, members of the assembly would be all over the place from 0th level up and so on?

I'm not saying there aren't exceptional rulers, because this period is full of them. But there are also puppets and figureheads, politicians who've never handled a spear in anger, children being run by their regents and so on. What I'm arguing for here is variety. For every Demetrius Poliorcetes there's several Amyntas the Milds, non-entities who've ended up on the ivory chair with a diadem on their head because the assemblies of soldiers and coteries of powerful men decided to install someone pliable with the right heritage rather than split the kingdom in civil war.

Unarmed Combat

In the period I'm looking at, pankration is an essential part of a warrior's training. Are there any Proficiencies for unarmed combat, so that the warrior who has spent lots of time on the sands of the palaestra is notably better than less-trained people at striking and grappling?

How easily can it be used in armed conflict? I'm thinking particularly of stuff like grappling a close opponent after you've been disarmed/broken your spear/lost your sword, or doing things like grabbing enemies shields and attacking them with them (twist to break their arm or slam it up into their jaw).

Armour

Another brief one, how would you map period-appropriate armours? I see them vaguely in three categories:

Light - leather or linen corselet.

Medium - light armour with greaves and vambraces; scale corselet, back and breast plate, mail (which is exceptionally rare outside of a few rich Celts).

Heavy - Full hoplite panoply, full-body suit of scale armour.

A brief question on shields, do they work against missile weapons? Reason I'm asking is there's a Persian arm protection made of lots of iron rings worn over the shield arm. In melee it functions as a shield, but of course it's useless against missiles.

Kiero - Great to see you giving ACKS a try! Hellenistic Greece is one of my personal favorite eras of history, and is ripe for ACKS-style gaming. As it happens, I've also given some thought as to how you can introduce high level characters into a plausible historical world. So here's my advice!

CLASSES

You absolutely can have your players use the Player's Companion to design their own classes.

If you have the Player's Companion, you should include the Barbarian and the Venturer into your campaign. You'll need to modify the Venturer so that at higher level he gains bonus proficiencies instead of spells.

You might also consider introducing a version of the Machinist (removing the Dwarven racial powers) that could simulate a character like Archimedes of Syracuse or Hero of Alexandria. Allowing the PCs to field some of the wonders of Hellenistic technology could be justified from the history. Archimedes is attested to have built marvelous weapons such as "the ship shaker" and the "heat ray", Hero to have built a working steam engine, and of course Demetrius I built a "taker of cities" (125' siege tower) and 180' long battering ram. Not to mention the marvelous anthykeria mechanism.

The Mystic, with minor tweaking, could be an exotic character class hailing from the mysterious kingdoms beyond Bactria.

XP

In terms of balancing the classes, one thing that's worth noting is that plate armor is less common in this setting, so the ability of fighters to wear plate is less useful. Therefore fighters are probably only at about 1,850xp/level instead of 2,000xp/level. That means the thief, assassin, and bard need to be increased to about the range of 1,850xp.

Therefore, if you want to put all the classes on the same foot XP-wise, without rebuilding everything from scratch using the PC, the following "hacks" could help:

- 1) Thief: Increase thief HD from d4 to d6 and allow thieves to fight with weapon-and-shield.
- 2) Assassin: All assassins get Skirmishing as a class power.
- 3) Bard: Allow bards to wear medium armor and use shields. All bards begin with Performance (rhetoric) as well as one other Performance proficiency.

These are not perfect, but certainly very close.

With regard to XP as "book-keeping", in ACKS at least XP is intended as an *incentive*. The assumption is that all player activities are driven by a desire to get XP, so that real-world behavior of getting XP drives in-game behavior of accumulating wealth, establishing kingdoms, conquering domains, etc. If you have players who will "do what makes sense" in the context of your setting without this incentive, you can certainly do without it, but I've found that in an ACKS-like sandbox the XP is a meaningful incentive.

If you want something more rules-light that allows you to increase the character's level while still incentivizing them, you might try a staged system like this...

- To reach 3rd level, you must have accumulated at least 50% of that level's XP in wealth and possessions
- To reach 5th level, you must have at least 4 henchmen (or max by CHA)
- To reach 7th level, you must have established a domain
- To reach 9th level, you must have established a realm (domain with vassals)
- To reach 10th level, your realm must be at least county sized
- To reach 11th level, your realm must be at least
- To reach 12th level, your realm must be at least principality sized
- To reach 13th level, your realm must be at least kingdom sized
- To reach 14th level, your realm must be empire sized

TREASURE

ACKS prices were actually designed to be historically accurate, although because precious metals and various items varied in price in time and place, it's not perfect for any particular era. That said, it's *really easy* to convert ACKS to Hellenistic Greece.

In ancient Greece, these were the main currencies:

8 chalkoi = 1 obolus

6 oboloi = 1 drachma

100 drachmae = 1 mina (or mna)

60 minae = 1 Athenian Talent

1 Athenian talent is about 60lb of silver. In ACKS, there are 100 coins per pound, so 1 Athenian talent is 6000 coins. There are (100 x 60) 6,000 drachma per Athenian talent.

However, during the Hellenistic era the average soldier received 1-2 drachma per day in pay. We can associate this with D@W wages of 6gp (light infantry) to 12gp (heavy infantry) per month. With 1gp=10sp and 1 month = 30 days, that translates to a wage of (60/30) = 2sp/day to (120/30) = 4sp/day.

Therefore, you can convert ACKS to historical prices simply by halving all prices, wages, and loot drops; or by saying there are 200 coins per pound instead of 100 coins per pound while keeping the ACKS numbers the same (so the same weight of silver has equivalent value).

UNARMED COMBAT

An Unarmed Fighting proficiency is available in Player's Companion. I've excerpted it below for your convenience.

Unarmed Fighting: The character is an expert in striking with fist and feet. When brawling (see ACKS p.109), he may deal lethal damage. He can punch or kick characters in metal armor without himself taking damage.

Combat Trickery (Force Back, Incapacitate, Knock Down, Overrun, and Wrestling) would also be appropriate.

RULER LEVEL

By default, ACKS assumes that every normal man possesses the ability to become 14th level. To have rulers who aren't high level, change this assumption. Maximum level is a characteristic rated 0 to 14.

When a character is created, roll 1d100 to determine max level. Add the character's CHA bonus and his father's maximum level to the die roll.

01-77 1st level

78-91 2nd level

92-97 3rd level

98-99 4th level

100+ Roll again on Heroic Level table (1d100), adding any value above 100 to next roll

01-60 5th level

61-75 6th level

76-83 7th level

84-88 8th level

89-91 9th level

92-93 10th level

94-95 11th level

96-97 12th level

98-99 13th level

100+ 14th level

EXAMPLE: Alexander of Macedon (CHA 18) is born to Philip of Macedon (13th level Fighter). Alexander rolls for his maximum level. He rolls an 94 on 1d100, for a total of (94+3 CHA bonus + 13 father's level) 110. That means he gets to roll on the Heroic Level table at +10! He rolls 1d100 and gets a 90, +10 = 100. Alexander can achieve 14th level. Everyone who interacts with him at a young age can tell he has great promise of greatness.

ARMOR

The ACKS armors are already correlated with historical armors of antiquity. No modification is necessary. Plate Armor could, in theory, be worn (it would be a full hoplite panoply plus arm armor) but the heaviest armor is usually AC 4 (chain) or AC 5 (hoplite panoply without armor armor, or lamellar armor).

Kiero then wrote:

Alex - thank you for a great game! I never thought I'd be looking at an OSR-type game, but I guess there's a first time for everything.

Classes - good thoughts there, lots to work with. As you say, there's plenty of historical precedent for inventors and the like. I just finished Christan Cameron's Tyrant: Destroyer of Cities today, which features the siege of Rhodes.

XP - those tweaks to existing classes are really useful. Does anything need to be done about their variant save/Proficiency progression?

With regards XP-as-incentive, my group doesn't need it. But having progression milestones (have this much wealth, gather this many followers, etc) isn't a bad idea at all.

Treasure - thanks for that. Rather handily, once the treasuries of Persia had been opened onto the market, for a goodly time the silver:gold exchange rate was conveniently around 10:1. So I have an idea how much the odd bit of Persian gold is worth, when it turns up.

Unarmed combat - those two are probably more than sufficient to turn the pankrationist into an engine of destruction, even without a weapon.

Ruler level - that works. Part of the fun is that rather than always assuming a ruler is going to be high level, the player simply won't know. Is the guy who seems to be an ineffectual puppet really a fool or just a good actor with a setup that catches out potential enemies?

Armour - I figured as much, there isn't really much conversion necessary in any of the D&D standard armours. There isn't much mail around, though, unless someone's playing a rich Celt.

Thanks for the kind words on the game. I'm glad you are digging it. I haven't read Christian Cameron's *Tyrant*, but it sounds awesome! I was an Ancient History major as an undergraduate, and did my senior seminar on siege weaponry of the ancient world.

XP - I don't know how to account for the variant saves, really, in the XP progression; given no magic, no giant scorpions, no giant spiders, etc. saves will be less important, so I wouldn't worry about it. You might consider giving every class the Fighter proficiency progression (the fastest one) - that will enable your players to have more proficiencies with which to differentiate their characters in the absence of magic and magic items.

Incidentally, I worked this up a while back:

ALEXANDER THE GREAT, 14th level Fighter

Strength 14

Intelligence 18

Wisdom 12

Dexterity 18

Constitution 18

Charisma 18

Alignment: Lawful

AC: 9

HP: 82

Languages: Greek, Macedonian, Persian, Thracian

Class Proficiencies: Combat Reflexes, Command, Endurance, Manual of Arms, Running

General Proficiencies: Adventuring, Diplomacy, Knowledge (Philosophy), Leadership, Military Strategy 3, Riding (Horses)

Equipment: Lance, short sword, shield, lamellar armor, heavy helm

Domains at War Characteristics

Leadership Ability: 8

Strategic Ability: 6

Morale Modifier: 6

Notes:

Strength: Alexander is notably fit and strong but not overly so.

Intelligence: Alexander's undeniable brilliance in war and politics certainly place him in the top 0.5% of human intelligence. Whether he was solving the Gordian Knot, capturing the Sogdian Rock, or besieging Tyre, his ingenuity knew no bounds.

Wisdom: Alexander was strong-willed and confident, but also prone to bouts of drinking and emotional excess. I have assigned him a Wisdom which is above average, but not high enough to help him avoid his nemesis.

Dexterity: Alexander frequently accomplished great feats of dexterity. As a child he mastered a powerful warhorse. He famously beat his own bodyguard, Cleitus the Black, in a key initiative roll. He was reputed a very swift runner who might have competed in the Olympiad 200m but refused because the other runners were not kings.

Constitution: Alexander's endurance is legendary. He survived wound after wounds that would have killed most men. He survived the march through the Gedrosian Desert when all around him men dropped dead of sunstroke and dehydration.

Charisma: One of the few historical figures labeled The Great, he was worshipped as a god in his own lifetime and proclaimed 'master of the Universe' by the Egyptians. One doesn't rate Alexander's Charisma relative to an 18. One rates Charisma 18 relative to Alexander.

Proficiencies: Combat Reflexes, Command, Diplomacy, Manual of Arms, Leadership, and Military Strategy 3 are all self-evident from his historical accomplishments. Endurance represents his almost super-human stamina on the march. Running reflects his reputed Olympic-level speed. His taming of Bucephalus and lifelong positions as a cavalryman justify Riding (Horses). (He probably merits Animal Training, too, but alas Alexander had no more proficiency slots.) Knowledge (Philosophy) is from his tutoring by Aristotle.

Domains at War Characteristics: These are all at the maximum possible rank. Simply put, you do not want to face Alexander on the battlefield.

[People on the forums mostly think that I rate Alexander too highly, but I say they're just jealous they didn't roll 4 18s. :P]

Kiero then wrote:

Alright, so reading over the treasure conversion again; couldn't I halve the values, call them silver drachmae rather than silver pieces, and just assume the weights are adjusted so there's still 100 coins to the pound of weight?

Yes, you should just be able to convert to SP, reduce the prices by 1/2, and have close-to-historical prices. So, for example, a heavy infantry makes $(12\text{gp} \times 10\text{sp} / \text{gp} \times 1 \text{ drachma} / 2\text{sp})$ 60 drachma per month. A warhorse costing 250gp (2,500sp) becomes 1,250 drachma.

Going the other way, Bucephalus, at 13 talents, costs 7,800 drachma. That would then be 15,600sp or 1,560gp in normal ACKS.

Kiero then wrote:

Another random one. Ships and naval combat are an extremely important part of this era. How easily do the polyremes (trireme, quadrireme, quinquireme, etc) map to the generic ships listed?

Does naval combat account for stuff like rower condition (how well motivated, fit, well-fed and fatigued)?

ACKS offers 3 types of galleys:

Small Galley - 60 rowers. This is a bireme or penteconter.

Large Galley - 180 rowers. This is a trireme.

War Galley - 300 rowers. This is a quinquereme.

You could probably extrapolate from the structural hit points and speeds of these three to cover any other galley types you'd want to include.

There are no specific rules for rower condition. By default, ACKS assumes you can engage in 50 minutes of physical activity and then need to rest for 10 minutes. You could easily modify these rules, I think, to get the effect you want.

One thing about rower condition that I find interesting is that, in re-enactment tests, modern athletes cannot sustain the routine rowing speeds described in the ancient sources (or wear hoplite armor long enough to fight a battle). You'll have to decide if you want to base your fatigue rules on what the ancient sources say, or what the modern re-enactments suggest. I personally think the ancient sources are right (why would they lie about the day-to-day?) and that modern athletes are just epigenetically weaker. The book *Manthropology* has some great information on this.

Importing from Pathfinder

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/importing-pathfinder>

May 16, 2013

Tag: Q&A

SClaytonU wrote:

I've been running D&D games in my homebrew setting since the early 1990s. I began with 2nd Edition, switched to 3rd when it came out, then to 3.5. For the last few years, I've been running in Pathfinder, which all my players seem to love.

I, on the other hand, am tired. Thirteen years of dealing with the rules crunch of the 3.x iteration has worn me out. I'm interested in simplifying things, and have been investigating earlier editions.

The main thing that has held me back from just grabbing the old B/X rules and diving in is that I'm not ready to give up the stories and mythology of my homebrew setting. It represents almost 20 years of my DMing life, after all. To switch over to B/X from Pathfinder would require me to either reskin, rewrite, or eliminate entire concepts from my world as it currently stands (especially those which affect existing PCs).

That's where ACKS caught my eye, particularly the Player's Companion. Having some guidelines for creating custom classes in a B/X mold goes a long way towards making this a feasible switch for me. That said, I need a little advice from those with a bit more experience in the system (or preferably, both systems).

First, I intend on keeping Vancian prepared casting, at least for the actual wizards. I like the free casting for clerics and other divine types, but it just rubs me wrong for wizards, especially when I still have sorcerers with which to contend.

Ultimately, that's my first real challenge. A few very important existing characters in my world (both PC and NPC) are sorcerers, and I need a better way to model them than just making them mages and calling it a day. The fluff of the sorcerer as distinct from the wizard is too intertwined now with my setting to be handwaved away, so I need to figure out how to properly model that in ACKS.

Mechanically, I'd like them to still feel more or less like they do in 3.x, as arcane casters with a seriously limited spell selection, but more daily casting than a wizard. What would be the best way to achieve this while keeping the basic balance between classes intact? How many XP could such a character expect to require for leveling up? Would it throw the world off its axis if the ACKS sorcerer used Charisma instead of Intelligence as their prime requisite and casting stat?

Any insight or advice is welcome.

SClaytonU,

I faced a similar challenge as I've ported my own campaign world from 3.5 to ACKS back and forth a few times. Here's how I did it:

Sorcerer: Use the existing Mage rules. Their repertoire equals spells cast per day, plus their CHA bonus instead of INT bonus.

Wizard: Use the existing Mage rules. They must prepare spells in advance as per B/X. They have an unlimited number of spells in their spellbook.

These two options are more-or-less equivalent and I wouldn't adjust XP costs at all.

To differentiate the classes a bit further, give Sorcerers and Wizards a different selection of class proficiencies.

Wizard Proficiency List: Use mage list; e.g. Alchemy, Battle Magic, Beast Friendship, Black Lore of Zahar, Collegiate Wizardry, Craft, Diplomacy, Elementalism, Elven Bloodline, Engineering, Familiar, Healing, Illusion Resistance, Knowledge, Language, Loremastery, Magical Engineering, Mapping, Mystic Aura, Naturalism, Quiet Magic, Performance, Prestidigitation, Profession, Sensing Power, Transmogrification, Soothsaying, Unflappable Casting

Sorcerer Proficiency List: Add Apostasy, Contemplation, Divine Health, Magical Music, Sensing Evil; remove Black Lore of Zahar, Collegiate Wizardry, Loremastery, Magical Engineering.

Divine Spell Progression Error?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/divine-spell-progression-error>

May 17, 2013

Tag: **Insight**

tardigradepat wrote:

There is something off about Divine Spell Progression; Bladedancers, Clerics, Priestesses, Shamans, and every other Divine Spellcasting class seem to get both 3rd and 4th level spells at the same level. Specifically, sixth level.

Now on the one hand this looks like an obvious error, like the Paladin's Dark Fortress in the Player's Companion, but there are two things giving me pause. Firstly, the consistency with which it has been applied means that it would have to have slipped by every editor and playtest, for every divine class, which seems unlikely. Secondly, because I have no idea what the progression is supposed to look like.

So is this an error, and if so what is the correct progression? If it isn't an error why do Divine Spellcasters get access to both 3rd and 4th level spells at the same time?

Hmm, it's not a 'problem' unless you think it is.

The spell progression used in ACKS is what appears in B/X. ACKS grew out of a long-running B/X campaign. I didn't play BECM I or RC D&D, so that wasn't my main source. You might note that Thief skills have the values from B/X, not BECM I, too. And Clerical turning is closer to that in B/X than in any of the other versions of the game..

So, starting from B/X, when I encountered problems in the campaign, I changed the rules that were causing the problem. When I encountered areas that lacked rules, I created rules for them. When I saw economic inconsistencies, I fixed them.

The Cleric spell progression didn't cause problems, and it didn't lack rules, and it didn't create economic inconsistencies. So why change it? I didn't change things unless I had a justification for doing so. It's the same reason Clerics don't cast spells at 1st level in ACKS.

And consider: The current Cleric spell progression ends up letting Clerics cast "restore life and limb" at level 7. A more rationalized (mathematically consistent) progression would see that pushed back to level 10. Would that be a virtue for the game? I'm not sure, but I don't think so.

I could probably provide further justification by referencing the differences between American and French Revolution and the philosophy of Hayek and Burke, but this tends to bore people.

tardigradepat then wrote:

I like the idea that you can only raise the dead after being able to build a castle, but again I haven't gotten much chance to see that part of play in ACK yet; this is more of me trying to head off potential issues before my campaign gets into the higher levels than nitpicking math.

As for the history/economics stuff, fire away. It's not my field but always interesting to read about.

It's not so much historical or economic as philosophical. Burke and Hayek both make the point that when you are handling laws or customs that have been handed down to you, you should be very careful about changing them lest you inadvertently break something in the system. Laws and customs usually have been shaped by the collective wisdom of prior generations and in seeking to replace seemingly hodge-podge laws and customs of the past with streamlined, rational systems we often break our societies. This concern lies at the heart of conservatism, understood as an intellectual tradition.

Nowhere is this difference more apparent than in the gulf between the American and French Revolutions. The American Revolution sought to maintain ancient freedoms - the Constitution enshrined principles of common law that were centuries old. It was a conservative revolution. In contrast, the French Revolution was inspired by rationalist philosophy; it swept away all that had come before it in favor of radical change - such as new, decimal measures of time-keeping. One of these revolutions succeeded, and the other was replaced within a generation by a military dictatorship, its "reforms" consigned to history's failed experiments.

With regard to game design, I take a Burkean or Hayekian approach towards the rules that have come before me. I assume that game mechanics that have stood the test of time have probably done so for a reason. I try not to change things unless I encounter a reason in play to do so. When I encounter an area that seems like it needs a new rule, I try to find a source in actual play, or a source in history. So there's an inherent conservatism in my designs.

An example of where this shows up is Cleaving.

Cleaving was implemented because I noticed that the earliest versions of D&D all had some mechanism to allow fighters to have exponential value against weak opponents, a power that had later been rationalized away in 2e/3e. I researched all the different ways that Arneson, Gygax, Barker, etc. had addressed the issue, tested them, and went with the one that worked best in my tests.

Anyway, as I said, this is really high-philosophy stuff. If you don't like the Cleric spell progression, change it and share your house rules with us. Then let us know on the forums how it went in play.

tardigradepat then wrote:

It's interesting you list the metric system specifically, seeing as it's arguably the most successful innovation of the revolution. But as to the general point I absolutely agree that change should be well thought-out, although I see scrutinizing old ideas as equally important. Hence me bringing the question here; I don't want to mess with anything important, but I'd prefer not to let something which may be an error stay unexamined.

As for my "house rule", all I did was change the Cleric progression over to the BECMI/Rules Cyclopedia version, which is very nearly identical except for pushing 4th level spells to 8th level and 5th to 10th level (it also included 6th level spells by 12th, but that doesn't fit in the ACK system). The Craftpriest cuts off at 10th, which means they barely have 5th level casting; that may or may not be a problem depending on how "hard" the Demi-human level limits are supposed to be.

With the Priestess and Witch progression it gets trickier because I have no idea where it comes from or what sort of pattern it follows. At the moment I'm thinking about bumping up the Cleric progression one level, although that significantly weakens the classes. I'm not happy with that idea though, and will probably settle on a less extreme change.

Actually, changing from the B/X spell progression to the BECMI spell progression is a huge change, if you take the economics and demographics of your fantasy world as seriously as ACKS assumes you do.

Under ACKS/BX, 7th level clerics can cast Restore Life and Limb. Take a kingdom of 6 million and the default ACKS demographics of leveled characters. That means there are 245 clerics of 7th-14th level who will be capable of casting Restore Life and Limb. There will be a total of 280 castings per day, and based on the formula used to derive costs to cast spells, it will cost 500gp for the spell. To have a single caster of 7th level requires a city of 50,000.

Under BECMI, it takes a 10th level cleric to cast Restore Life and Limb. In the same kingdom of 6 million, there will now only be 12 clerics who can cast Restore Life and Limb (1 in 500,000), with a total of 13 castings per day. Based on the formula used to derive costs to cast spells, it will cost 2,200gp for the spell. To have a single caster of 10th level requires a city of 500,000 - of which there are probably no more than 1-3 in an entire continent. Since the efficacy of Restore Life and Limb decreases with each day after death, most adventurers will be unable to get to a cleric who can restore life, since their adventures will tend to take place far from Class I markets.

So this one small change means that Restore Life and Limb will be 1/20th as common at best, almost entirely unavailable to adventurers who are actually adventuring, and hideously more expensive. It suggests a game world where the emperors and kings might be restored of life and limb, but almost no one else is.

Then consider: What would happen to adventurers, as a social class, if Restore Life and Limb were 1/20th as common? It's likely that fewer would dare to become adventurers at all, and many fewer would survive to high level. So the demographics of heroism would probably have to be revised to reduce the number of high-level clerics. If we assume the average 10th level adventurer gets killed just one time between 1st and 10th level, that would mean that 10th level adventurers would be only 1/20th as common!

But that means that 10th level clerics would be even less common! And that would cascade again: Now perhaps Restore Life and Limb is 1/50th as a common. Now 10th level clerics aren't in 1 in 500,000 - they are 1 in 2.5 million. Now a cleric capable of casting Restore Life and Limb is a prophet who changes the world.

Now, you could overcome this by adopting more favorable demographics for high-level characters. Perhaps in your campaign world, 10th level characters are as common as 7th level characters in the default ACKS system. But that causes lots of other problems - because that means there's a LOT more treasure in your world, for one thing. Which means that all of the wages and earnings of nobles need to be revised. And on and on.

The economy in ACKS is built on an interlocking system that runs across 23 different worksheets in EXCEL.

You can of course simply hand-wave all of this, and keep Restore Life and Limb at 500gp available at Class III markets. But at some point you end up with awkward questions.

Dogpile on the Rabbit

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/dogpile-rabbit>

June 17, 2013

Tag: **Insight**

DrSkull wrote:

I always hate it when AC inflation makes a big pile of low level enemies totally useless in a fight. It really turns into a game killer for me as GM, since I want troops, followers etc to actually mean something.

So, right now I'm looking for ways for a unit of level 0 or level 1 guys to actually be threatening to high AC enemies. Now my first step is to be stingy with magical armor, but that's not always going to be under my control in this campaign. So, I need some clear ways for overcoming high AC's.

Idea #1: Surrounding the Big Man: If the high AC PC is standing by himself in the open, the squad of level 0 guys can surround him. I figure that the three to the front will have to attack his regular AC. I'd like to rule that the three to his rear would ignore his Shield, Dex Bonus, and would get a +2 attack (as a rear attack). So half of them might have at least fair to middling chance of scoring some hits. However, the dex and shield negation is more of a creeping memory from AD&D 1, so I don't know if I should use it. The number could be doubled to 12 guys if they have spears or polearms.

Idea #2: Special Moves: have the entire group just attempt to use the Knockdown special move: since they probably need a natural 20 to hit any way, the -4 penalty is no matter. It all depends how many guys can try it, could I reasonably rule that 20 guys form a wedge and just try to bowl him over. If several hit (by sheer chance) and he fails a save, then the next turn they all have a +2. Several might also try "Sunder" to break his shield if its not magical (especially if he's using the weapon and shield proficiency).

Idea #3: Sleazy House Rule: just add a "Gang Up Bonus", the only trouble with this is that I'd have to let the PC's then use it when they gang up on Dragons or Liches or what have you.

Idea #4: Massed Missile Fire: 100 arrows yields 5 natural twenties. Cheap, but I suppose it would work in a pinch.

If there were some other way to get some +2 or so to hit now and again, it would go a long way. Are there any other good dogpile methods that might help the lowly spear carriers against Hercules?

The key to ACKS is that there is always at least a 5% chance of a target being hit. This actually is quite deadly. It also is reasonably fair to heavily armored combatants. Assessments made in "From Sumer to Rome" where that the chance of a hit by an arrow on a shielded, armored warrior was less than 5%.

In any event, here are my suggestions:

1. Massed missile fire. As you note, 100 arrows yields 5 natural twenties. My players *dread* engagements with large numbers of missile-armed troops. They will almost immediately Charge to get into melee.
2. Charge and Set Against Charge. Lure the PCs into charging. Charging is a +2 bonus to hit but a -2 to AC, so they're vulnerable. If you can set against charge, even better - you'll strike simultaneously and deal double damage! Or, use waves of troops to charge a character who himself Charged. Then it's going to be +4 to hit (because the target's AC drops 2). That's a huge increase in the chances to strike.
3. Inspire Courage and Bless. A 1st level Bard-type can grant +1 to hit to an entire gang of troops. A single Bless spell does the same. Stack them together and you've substantially increased the troops' power. DO it to a group of archers and it gets messy fast.
4. Use Spears. Troops armed with spears can attack from the second rank, roughly doubling the number of attacks you are able to bring to bear.
5. Grief them with Special Maneuvers. Let's say that, despite your best efforts, your grunts are stuck attacking with natural 20s required. You may as well use Special Maneuvers like Knockdown or Wrestle or Sunder. If you can smash their shield, knock them prone, or best of all, grapple them, their defense will be highly compromised.

Important ACKS Core Errata: Urban Settlement Upkeep

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/important-acks-core-errata-urban-settlement-upkeep>

June 19, 2013

Tag: **Important Errata**

Alex wrote:

Miguel Zapico and his colleagues are working on a detailed ACKS project. To support their efforts, I shared one of the spreadsheets I used to develop the Revenue by Realm Type tables and other material.

Miguel noticed that in my spreadsheets that I'd used to build the tables (and the Auran Empire), I had the upkeep cost of urban settlements at 1gp per month, whereas in the book they are 1.5gp per month. The 1.5gp costs has resulted in some anomalies that others have pointed out before, but I missed it.

In any event, the correct value is 1gp per month (that's the value that underlies all the tables in the books). This will be corrected in the ACKS reprint.

Big thank you to Miguel for noticing the mistake.

The Keep from “Keep On The Borderlands” in ACKS Terms?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/keep-keep-borderlands-acks-terms>

June 23, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Chris wrote:

Hey everybody, sorry if this is a total re-run of an earlier topic post as I am sure it is, I can't seem to get forum search function to talk nice to me.

My home campaign is reaching into session 19 and I have decided to stop putting off the ACKSification of my region map that we have been using. (The fabulous forthcoming Autarch Wilderness map.) By ACKSification I mean to come up with some semblance of domain/city/geography organization for the local adjacent principality that controls the legendary "Keep" from Gygax's Module B2.

So my question is: How would you classify the keep? It has a secure market to buy certain things and a 6th level Fighter running the place as Castellan. I am not asking for ACKS rules and guidelines to hew by the word of "Gary who art in Celestia". But I am wondering about your take on it.

I have established that it is a Class V marketplace for ease of purchasing things, but I also haven't described it as surrounded by farmland and houses that you would expect an urban settlement (with a market that size) to have by the book.

So, is the Keep a strongpoint of a larger settlement, perhaps a long series of farms and houses up the road, away from the caves of chaos? Or is it an isolated fortification with a kick-ass market and not beholden by the general urban settlement rules.

What is the level of the castellan, does he have a vassal domain elsewhere? Is he a Marquis of the larger principality. Once again, I am not looking for hard adherence to rules, just general opinions.

Also my other questions for the day with apologies to A. Macris:

Is there a page that more closely explains the difference in leader level between independent urban settlements and ones within larger domains?

When figuring the total division of population and hexes of land between vassals and subvassals, does each "leader" of those vassals get their own personal domain population and area taken out of the pool to be divided among their vassals? (As per personal domain listed on the charts on page 230?) I assume so.

If, in general, 10% of a realm's population clusters in an urban settlement, including small hamlets. What form of living situation do the other 90% of the families have in a domain? Wouldn't that mean that you couldn't fling a fireball without hitting a random cottage in the countryside. Each 6 mile hex in a domain would be riddled with hovels. And wouldn't that be easy pickings for any monsters whatsoever in a domain hex. (1 in 6 random wilderness encounter each day.)

Thanks folks.

Great question, Greengoat. I encountered this problem myself, because the original Auran Empire Campaign began with Keep on the Borderlands!

My own calculations put the keep at 442,500gp. Whatever the exact amount, it's clearly a lot. In point of fact, the "keep" is anything but - it's a fairly large fortress, about a hectare in size. The huge Krak Des Chevalier, designed for 2,000 men, was 2.5 hectares in size, so the keep might be built for 700 men!. It's definitely larger than the famous Harlech Castle (excluding the wall around the base of the hill), which is about 250' x 200' to the keep's 350' x 250'.

Moreover, for a military fortress intended to secure the border, it doesn't seem to be designed correctly. It looks more like a castle designed to be the residence of a lord. The huge bailey looks designed for use as a marketplace or place of shelter.

http://asukamaxwell.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/krak_des_chevaliers.jpg

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Harlech_Castle_Plan.jpg

What I would conclude is that the location where the Keep was built was once a large civilized realm ruled by the forces of Law. The keep used to have a flourishing town nearby. Nowadays, the land has been overrun by Chaos, and the surviving domain(s) near the Keep is much smaller than what such a large fortress would normally imply. The ruler of the Keep is much lower in level than one would expect, as well. The low revenues of his land-holdings probably make it hard to afford stronghold upkeep for the Keep. The ruler is either cash-poor or he is allowing the Keep to fall into disrepair. He certainly can't afford enough men to properly man the Keep, and as such is desperate for help from adventurers willing to work "for free" (e.g. plunder).

14th Century Earth

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/actual-play/14th-century-earth>

July 17, 2013

Tag: **Insight**

CainGillespie wrote:

It's my turn to run a game for my friends, and I thought I would finally get around to playing ACKS! Lately I've been failing to learn how to play Europa Universalis 3, and I liked the idea of using a fantastical version of late 14th century Earth as the setting. I've decided that I'm going to start things off in Venice, but otherwise there's going to be no starting story. When things start, things are going to be more or less where they were historically: two popes, Venice warring with Genoa, John V Palaiologos is traveling Europe trying to get help against the Ottomans, etc. The players know better than to bone up on trivia to take advantage of "prescience" but things will probably play out differently anyways.

I'm trending towards not having demi-humans and having humanoids in underground, underwater, and other extremely remote/inhospitable lands. There will be monsters in the wilderness, and undead will haunt the usual places.

The game will likely start sometime in the next week or three. Does anyone have any advice, suggestions, or admonishments? Once things get rolling, I'll share the groups exploits and pitfalls. Are there any good resources you can point out? Has someone already done this, because I'd love to nab any details someone might have made for domain revenues and markets!

Cain,

That sounds like a marvelous setting! My wife and I have been playing Assassin's Creed II and that has made me want to try out a similar setting. There was also an old computer game called The Prince which had you run international trade, manipulate cardinals and bishops, and so on, that was inspirational for ACKS...

Rules: Here are a few ideas to give you a Renaissance feel rather than high fantasy...

- Make Sleep a 3rd level spell, Lightning Bolt a 4th level spell, and Fireball a 5th level spell. Wish is an 11th level spell (e.g. unavailable).

- Replace Mages with "Natural Philosophers" or "Alchemists". These would be built along the lines of Warlocks, but with Lore mastery and Alchemy instead of the other class powers.

- Add a human version of the Dwarven Machinist, called Artificer. That lets you have your Leonardo da Vinci flying machines and whatnot.

Maps:

Video game websites or strategy guides for Assassin's Creed II/Brotherhood probably have maps of all the Italian cities in those games. They won't necessarily be historically accurate but they'll be well-sized for use in a game.

Alexis at Tao of D&D has hex maps of Europe published on his site, and information about demand and trade in Europe.

Plotting:

One thing I've found is that ACKS plays best when there are dual threats, one political and one fantastical-existential. (Think how in Game of Thrones, there's the War of the 5 Kings AND the White Walkers beyond the Wall). In your Renaissance Italy setting the political threats are many and delightful. I'd recommend you come up with a hidden fantastical threat of some sort.

Maybe the Ottomans have been breeding a race of beastmen as their new Janissaries and will soon be unleashing these unstoppable killing machines on Christendom. No one believes that a monotheistic nation would engage in the pagan dark magic involved in this, and reports of sighting of the creatures go ignored.

Maybe a coterie of vampires has been slowly assimilating the families of a particular city-state (Venice? Rome - the Papacy!). If unchecked they will unleash a magical plague that will leave the realm on its knees and ripe for takeover.

Etc.

Monthly Hijink Income vs. Starting City Criminal Guild

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/monthly-hijink-income-vs-starting-city-criminal-guild>

July 20, 2013

Tag: **Insight**

koewn wrote:

I'm making an attempt to learn2domain in ACKS, and I'm putting out a complete Duchy, economics wise (I am disambiguating the vassals)

I've worked my way down to the criminal guild.

I'm trying to rectify the Monthly Hijink Income table, pg 141, which states specifically that it takes into account wages, attorneys, bribes, etc. with the Starting City Criminal Guilds table on pg 237, which is just plain revenue.

If I take a Class IV guild, at 100 members, and break down the income via the MHI table like so (based on the info in Determine Criminal Guilds on pg 237):

*45 0th level Ruffians: 45 gp/mo (45 * 1)*

*35 1st level whatever: 175 gp/mo (35 * 5)*

*13 2nd level whatever: 390 gp/mo (13 * 30)*

7 3rd+ level: 1850 gp (5 3rds @200, 2 4ths @ 425)

That's a total after-costs income of 2460.

Assuming Hideouts have Stronghold upkeep costs, that's another 1000gp/mo for the 20K gp hideout.

So, taking the monthly syndicate revenue of 7,350, we subtract 1,000 gp in upkeep, take out the 2,460 in average income, which leaves us with 3,890 gp that should be representing the costs of crime, yes?

From that, we calculate the wages of the 100 ruffians above - that's:

45 0th level: 270 gp

35 1st level: 875 gp

13 2nd level: 650 gp

5 3rd level: 500 gp

2 4th level: 400 gp

for 2,695 in wages per month. Take that out of our 3,890, and we know we're spending 1,195 gp on various attorneys, bribes, and other stuff.

There's probably an inverse relation on how much of that is spent per member per level - a lot of that is spent on the 45 0th levels, for example, and hopefully not as much on your 4th level stars.

I'm going spreadsheet blind (as evidenced by my 5->8 edits on this thing) so I'm stopping there for now.

Let me know if I'm nuts.

To work out the value of a thief at each level, I:

- (1) Calculated his chance of success at each different hijink (10% - 35%)
- (2) Calculated his chance of being caught at each different hijink (5% - 25%)
- (3) Calculated his wages
- (4) Calculated the syndicate's fee if he succeeded in each hijink (\$95 - \$1,300)
- (5) Calculated the syndicate's expected return from success (% from step 1 x value from step 4), per hijink
- (6) Calculated the syndicate's damages if a ruffian is captured in a hijink*
- (7) Calculated the syndicate's expected loss from capture (% from step 2 x value from step 6), per hijink
- (8) Calculated the syndicates return in each hijink as (expected return from success) - (wages + expected loss from damages).
- (9) Disregarded any hijinks that would have a return of 0, and averaged the return of all other hijinks

*Note on 6: This in turn cascades down into another set of subtables for each type of hijink which models out the expected damages at each level of conviction or acquittal, for each time of crime, then sums of the likelihood of each level of conviction x expected damages, for each type of hijink. For punishments that caused maiming, I calculated the damages as equal to the cost of magical curing. I then used estimates of attorney and bribe expenditure at each level. This resulted in a net expected cost if caught for each crime, ranging from \$51.03 for drunkenness to \$4,174.52 for treason.

I did this for every combination of hijinks at every level. This took a long time. How did this work out in practice?

At 0th level, the result was 14gp expected return, 6.89gp expected loss, and 6gp wage, for a total of (14 - 12.89) 1.11gp, which I rounded to 1gp.

At 1st level, the result was 33gp expected return, 3.45gp expected loss, 25gp wage, for a total of $(33 - 28.45)$ 4.55gp, which I rounded to 5gp.

It was then time to use this data to apply it against the thief's guilds themselves. I first calculated the number of thieves of each level likely to be present in each class of city. I then inputted the revenue (from above) for each thief of each level and was able to work out a total value for the thieves' guild of each city.

I then assumed that the thieves' guilds were organized into syndicates with 5 underbosses of each tier at each level, and adjusted earnings accordingly. The result was the charts in the book.

An astute accountant might say "a thieves' guild that ran itself specifically to make money by doing only those hijinks which had just the net highest value at every level, rather than a mix of ALL profitable hijinks, would make more than this!"

But in the time frame ACKS covers, there were no astute accountants. There was no excel, and no double-entry book-keeping, and hardly any understanding of budgeting. To assume that a criminal enterprise would be run at optimum, excel-based efficiency seemed, to me, to be ludicrous. So I didn't do that.

A ruthless PC thief might say "As boss, I don't think its worth worth paying for attorney's fees or bribes for my failures, and I certainly wouldn't worry about treating their wounds!"

I would respond that this is certainly the PC's prerogative. But in actual play, such PCs have quickly run into a shortage of thieves; moreover, if one tracks XP (as we did in my playtest), one realizes that abandoning low-level thieves to their fate soon leads to no mid-level thieves advancing. So, in actual play, PCs tended to do everything they could to keep their thieves alive and out of jail. So, based on that, I assumed NPC bosses would do the same.

Hope that makes sense!

Puzzles?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/puzzles>

July 31, 2013

Tag: **Insight**

susan_brindle wrote:

Do Puzzles have a place in ACKS-type old school gaming? Do you use them at your table? If so, what kinds do you use? What are your favorites?

I'm partial to the occasional riddle, but every once in awhile I delve into my pile of Sierra adventure games and steal something more interesting. There are some very interesting puzzles in the King's Quest games, I've found.

Recently I exposed my group to a modified version of one, wherein they were confronted with a short poem inscribed on the wall, and to reveal the hidden staircase, they had to press in one letter from each line to spell out the word DESCEND (the letters were also spaced out diagonally, so it made a sorta staircase shape too)

I do use puzzles at my table, yes. My puzzles generally are of a few types:

1. Obscure hints or cryptic markings which offer ambiguous clues about some unknown which requires a decision.

or

2. Complex components that interact together, each of which can individually be understood through game mechanics but the sum of which requires player intelligence to understand.

In both cases I try to make sure that there is an advantage to having a character with the right know-how, but that just having a character with the right know-how isn't enough.

Put another way, characteristics are a necessary but not sufficient condition, while player intelligence is usually insufficient without characteristics to help get info.

Ability Scores and Saving Throws

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/ability-scores-and-saving-throws>

July 31, 2013

Tag: **Insight**

Yukiomo wrote:

Is there any particular reason that Wisdom is the only ability score that affects your saving throws? Or is it because of legacy rules?

I think this is part of a larger question of "how much should ability scores matter". In ACKS, we took a middle ground between OD&D (they hardly matter at all) and D&D 3.5 (they apply to everything).

But there are certainly places where a valid argument could be made for ability score modifiers applying:

- WIS modifier to Hear Noise, Find Traps, or Detect Secret Doors
- DEX modifier to Pick Pockets, Open Locks, Remove Traps, Move Silently, Hide in Shadows
- STR or DEX modifier to Climb Walls
- STR modifier to number of stones that can be carried at each encumbrance level (5/7/10)
- STR, DEX, CON modifiers to various saving throws

Most of these have been brought up as discussion points in the past. All of them share the following elements:

- They make high ability scores more important and cripple low ability scores
- They make some character classes "hard to not suck at", e.g. adding ability scores to thief rolls makes STR, DEX, and WIS much more important for thieves

Should you use them? I think you might consider ability score modifiers in two types of games.

1) "Super Gritty" games with sharp demarcations between the "haves" and the "have nots", with the PCs in the "have nots". Rolled with straight 3d6, PCs will treasure their few rare stats.

2) "Super Heroic" games where the PCs have average stats of 14+ and are meant to be a cut-above.

Working on Psionics

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/working-psionics>

November 26, 2013

Tag: **New Material**

Rhynn wrote:

I'm working on psionics rules for my Crimson Sun campaign, but I can't find a solution that satisfies me.

My end-goal is both "wild talents" (characters with random psionic powers, usually no more than 1) and psionic classes (like mages, spellswords, nightblades, etc., but with psionic powers).

I could just plug in Courtney Campbell and Nathan Lord's Psionic OSR supplement, but I find it too heavy; 40 pages of rules is too much. Psionic points and multiple attack and defense modes are too much.

I'd love to just create a list of powers, preferably with the same names as spell (condensing power descriptions mostly to "As the spell."), but this seems like a backwards way: it'd mostly limit the powers to existing spells. Dividing the powers by levels may be tricky, too: I've got a list of 62 powers (mostly just "As the spell."), but I'd need to divide them among 1-6 levels... and I'm not sure that's even the right way to approach psionic powers. (AD&D didn't divide them by levels.)

If I don't make the powers divided by level, I'd need to build them into some sort of trees (AD&D style) with prerequisite powers...

I've also considered dividing psionic powers into "tracks": you choose a track and get specific powers at specific levels, and can either use them at will or e.g. an level-based amount of times per day. I have no clue how I'd balance such classes, though. Doing the psionic powers as Spell-Like Abilities would seriously limit their usage.

I'm not looking to create that broad of an array of powers, anyway: mostly, I want telepathy (which automatically grants you some kind of ability for psychic combat), ESP, telekinesis, and pyrokinesis, maybe teleportation... I'm divided on "psychometabolism," but since it's pretty much part of Dune I guess it's in.

There's also a very specific issue: no matter what approach I take, I want powers equivalent to nearly at-will telekinesis and telepathy spells available. How unbalanced is that going to be?

I guess I'm mostly looking for ideas, comments, and sounding boards. Has anybody worked out psionics-type powers for ACKS, or know of a really simple OSR-compatible psionics system I could plug in?

Hi Rhynn, as far as I know no one has worked out any psionic rules for ACKS.

Just riffing off the top of my head, you might try something like this:

To use Psionics, the character makes a psionics throw against a target value based on his level. (You could use the target values for Magic Research, or the target value for Saves v. Spells, perhaps; or you could create custom target values for different psionic class progressions.)

The character modifies his target value by equivalent of the spell level of the effect he is trying to achieve and adds his Wisdom bonus to the roll. On a success, the effect is triggered as if cast. On a failure, the character takes WIS damage equal to the level of the spell. WIS recovers at 1 point per hour.

On a natural 1, some sort of psychic trauma occurs - possibly use one of the mishap tables from Player's Companion.

Before the roll, the character can expend WIS for bonus on the roll. This also recovers at 1 point per hour.

All powers are divided into different tracks. Each track has a proficiency associated with it. The first rank of the proficiency allows you to use psionic powers of that type. Each additional rank gives a +2 bonus on throws to use powers in that track.

EXAMPLE: Aerion is a 5th level character with Psychokinetics 2 and Psychometabolism 1 proficiencies. His WIS is 16 (+2). His psionic target value is 12+ (from the ACKS magic research throw table).

Aerion wants to "cast" Telekinesis, a 5th level effect in the Psychokinetics track. He will roll 1d20 against a target value of (12+5) 17+. He gets a +3 bonus on the roll (+2 from WIS, +1 from proficiency), so he'll need a 14. On a failure, he'll suffer 5 points of WIS damage.

He decides to voluntarily spend 5 points of WIS for a +5 bonus. Now he needs a 9+. Tragically he rolls a 3, and still fails. He takes a further 5 points of WIS loss, temporarily reducing his WIS to 6.

Totally unplaytested but something like that might work.

First Game!

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/first-game>

November 24, 2013

Tag: **Insight**

Waegdaeg wrote:

Well first of I would like to say that was wicked amounts of fun! After two years of pathfinder I think my group really wanted a change of pace (enough to demand a second session in the same night). This was our first shakedown run in preparation for a campaign in a few months.

Our party consisted of a spellsword, a fighter, a craftpriest and a thief, with two 0th level henchmen. For the first time ever in our assorted experiments in old school rules (mostly labyrinth lords) we had no fatalities. In fact the party waded effortlessly through a lot of the encounters.

Everyone who could equip a spear/polearm did so and combat actually became somewhat trivial. Door would open, surprise roll would cost maybe cost the party a couple turns between them, (combat reflexes was popular to cancel out the polearm penalty) and possibly the goblins/orcs. Then if possible the party would start making charges, and using the back row rule to concentrate fire and could usually cut the encounter down by 2-3 opponents with cleaves from the spellsword and fighter, and usually forcing a morale roll. The goblins/orc meanwhile had to make do with 1d6 from their spears/swords and no bonuses to initiative.

Is this right or is this weird DM survivor's guilt (in that they survived)? How do you rule monster equipment - do you give them plate and polearms the match the players? How about phalanx fighting - are the players just playing smart or am I missing something?

Attack throws were problematic as well, in the end I just ended up giving them the monster's AC and writing down theirs, but this seems wrong. How do you guys handle it?

Markets were another issue, the players seemed to outgrow their class IV market as soon as their first wagon of treasure came in, being unable to sell half of their loot (I used buying availability for selling availability). Is that how it works?

Finally the mapping proficiency - we use a dry erase mat with miniatures, which I usually just draw myself. In that case what does it do? Is it only for games where the players exclusively map?

Other than that progress felt pretty fast compared to labyrinth lords/pathfinder. A couple lair troves over two adventures and everyone was level 2-3.

Also those two farmboy henchmen in fur Armour with three hit points were just impossible to kill off - it was the weirdest thing.

Thanks for the actual play report. Here are some thoughts / responses to your questions.

Our party consisted of a spellsword, a fighter, a craftpriest and a thief, with two 0th level henchmen.

APM: Good, balanced party. Long-term the lack of a faster-leveling mage and cleric will hurt a bit, but for low level this is a very strong force.

Everyone who could equip a spear/polearm did so and combat actually became somewhat trivial. Door would open, surprise roll would cost maybe cost the party a couple turns between them, (combat reflexes was popular to cancel out the polearm penalty) and possibly the goblins/orcs. Then if possible the party would start making charges, and using the back row rule to concentrate fire and could usually cut the encounter down by 2-3 opponents with cleaves from the spellsword and fighter, and usually forcing a morale roll. The goblins/orc meanwhile had to make do with 1d6 from their spears/swords and no bonuses to initiative.

Is this right or is this weird DM survivor's guilt (in that they survived)?

APM: That's absolutely right! Your players immediately grasped the right tactics to use, and were well-deserving of their victories.

How do you rule monster equipment - do you give them plate and polearms the match the players? How about phalanx fighting - are the players just playing smart or am I missing something?

APM: The players are playing smart. As far as monster equipment, the monsters should use the default equipment listed in their entry. Many beastmen carry spears, but generally only hobgoblins are disciplined enough to fight using double-ranked spear phalanxes. (Of course you can do as you prefer, as it's your campaign; I'm answering merely from the point of view of the 'default' ACKS rules.)

Attack throws were problematic as well, in the end I just ended up giving them the monster's AC and writing down theirs, but this seems wrong. How do you guys handle it?

APM: When a PC attacks, I have him simultaneously roll his attack throw and damage, then announce what AC he hit and what damage he scored. I then inform him whether he hit, and the monster's reaction. Remember, the AC hit can be swiftly determined as [roll - attack throw target value].

EXAMPLE: Assume the monster has AC 5. "I hit AC 4 for six points," the player says. "A miss! A fierce blow that clangs off the monster's shield," you respond. Next round, "I hit AC 5 for two points," the PC says. "You find a chink in the orc's armor and stab inward. It begins to bleed."

APM: When a monster attacks, I generally inquire as to the PC's current AC, then roll. Alternatively, you can handle this in the reverse of the method above. "The orc swings his scimitar at you, hitting AC 3 for 5 points." "He misses, I've got AC 7!" If so inclined, you can let the player narrate this ("I duck under his sword swing!") or you can narrate it ("You duck under his sword swing!").

Markets were another issue, the players seemed to outgrow their class IV market as soon as their first wagon of treasure came in, being unable to sell half of their loot (I used buying availability for selling availability). Is that how it works?

APM: That's exactly correct, and by design. It's meant to do two things.

1) Discourage them from collecting junk. One of the nuisances of old-school play is that if it sometimes incentivizes the PCs to pick up **everything**, no matter how low value it might be, on the assumption that every broken scimitar and half-battered bed can somehow be sold. The market availability rules are an in-world way of discouraging this behavior. The heroes will focus on bringing back things they can sell.

2) Motivate them to take periodic trips to larger towns. This is often a nice segue into the mercantile venture rules. ("Since we're heading to Westport, why don't we buy some furs? I hear they sell at a premium there....") It's also an opportunity to find more henchmen, encounter NPCs, see the world, etc.

APM: If this proves troublesome in play, you can simply make the starting town a higher class. Just wave your hand and say, "because of its proximity to trade routes, this small town is actually a Class III market". History is filled with such things. Remember that the ACKS rules are always providing averages and defaults, and aren't meant to be a straightjacket.

Finally the mapping proficiency - we use a dry erase mat with miniatures, which I usually just draw myself. In that case what does it do? Is it only for games where the players exclusively map?

APM: Yes, it was designed for games where the PCs handle mapping. Given your style of play, you could (a) ask one PC to take Mapping; (b) assume that Mapping is included within the Adventuring proficiency; or (c) assume that a henchmen or hireling has Mapping. Other than that progress felt pretty fast compared to labyrinth lords/pathfinder. A couple lair troves over two adventures and everyone was level 2-3.

APM: Something that jumps out in your post is that you and your player seemed somewhat surprised that ACKS rewarded good tactics, that no one died, and that low-level play wasn't a painful grind. I'm really glad that all of those things are true. Death will come - by sheer probability, it will - but ACKS really is intended to give a fun low-level play experience that rewards parties that use tactics. There have been a lot of subtle tweaks to the game that make a low-level ACKS party a lot more survivable and fun than a comparable low-level ACKS party.

Waegdaeg then wrote:

[quote=archon]

APM: Good, balanced party. Long-term the lack of a faster-leveling mage and cleric will hurt a bit, but for low level this is a very strong force.

[/quote]

I thought that the more powerful classes that level slowly and cap early was an interesting idea, but the craftpriest seems underpowered relative to the vaultguard. At their respective caps vaultguard and fighter seem pretty comparable - same damage bonuses, fighter has slightly better attack, vaultguard has better saves. But the cleric seems to just keep advancing over the craft-priest, ending with nearly twice as many spells and better turning.

Are the 'identify' and detect traps abilities able to balance out the craftpriest in the long run?

Also, how do you handle detecting/removing traps in game, or locks for that matter? Thief seems almost like a 'class tax' on the party. Fighter, cleric and mage all have various classes that can fill their role, but only one class can detect traps/remove traps and pick locks.

Make do without (bring ten foot poles and a crowbar)? Use hirelings?

Craftpriest: The Craftpriest's key power is actually their "attention to detail". A +3 bonus on proficiency rolls for all proficiencies they learn is a huge bonus. It makes them superior at virtually anything. Particularly good proficiencies to use with this power are Alchemy, Healing, Knowledge, Lore Mastery, Magical Engineering. A Craftpriest with a couple ranks of Healing proficiency will be the best medic in the game.

Thieves: I don't think I understand the idea of a "class tax". Some classes can do things that others cannot. That's part of what makes it fun to have lots of classes. Most of the time there will be different solutions to any given problem. For example, clerics can turn undead - but if you don't have a cleric, you can kill the undead or avoid them. Thieves can pick locks; if you don't have a thief, you can bash the lock, smash the door, or bypass the area.

Barrowmaze and ACKS

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/barrowmaze-and-acks>

January 01, 2013

Tag: Q&A

golan2072 wrote:

Does any of you have any experience with Barrowmaze, the megadungeon by Greg Gillespie? I am VERY tempted to use it (I own both volumes) and I wonder how easy it is to use with ACKS.

Also, how easy is it to convert Barrowmazes' Labyrinth Lord monster stats into ACKS stats?

Barrowmaze should be 99% compatible with ACKS.

- 1) Reverse the AC with the formula $(9 - LL\ AC) = ACKS\ AC$.
- 2) Add proficiencies, if desired, to any NPCs
- 3) Check out the major encounters and adjust the treasure ratios as desired

Malo Monkey then wrote:

Asaris, this is likely a bit late for you. I'd love to see your feedback on running the dungeon.

I'm getting ready to run Barrowmaze. I ran an analysis of the above-ground Barrow Mounds monster xp to treasure value ratio and it comes out very close to 1:4 if you don't include the base cost sale value of the magic items.

If you do include the potential sale cost of the magic items, it doesn't even come close as the ratio is 1:45.

The breakdown is 1,001 xp in monsters, 3,794 gp in mundane treasure, and 45,259 gp worth of magic items.

I have not yet calculated the values for the underground Barrowmaze itself.

CORRECTION: The xp value of the monsters is only 431. I was mistakenly using the Labyrinth Lord xp values for the 2 Barrow Guardians, which in the module are listed as 350 xp each. However, in ACKS, these 3 HD monsters are only worth 65 xp each.*

So, the above-ground mounds are a little rich in treasure value with a ratio closer to 1:9. Shrug. One might look on this as the proverbial carrot with the underground maze being the stick. :)

With regard to the ratio, I (and the treasure tables) generally ignore the sale price of magic items. If you include it into the mix, it essentially forces the PCs to sell magic items to level. ACKS is more-or-less built on the assumption that magic items are kept or given to henchmen in most cases.

The occasional sale of a magic item is rare enough to be an "XP treat".

Running the Temple of Elemental Evil with ACKS

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/running-temple-elemental-evil-acks>

December 01, 2013

Tag: **Insight**

wamba_the_fool wrote:

Greetings!

I'm GMing an ACKS game; we're all new to it, and old-school-style games in general (the oldest of us has played AD&D; I cut my eyeteeth on 3.5). "Good ol' dungeon-crawl bash in the door kill the bad guys take their stuff" was the type of game desired, and so I've decided the Temple of Elemental Evil should do. They didn't want to start fresh (us having run through perhaps six different systems in as many months) so I threw everyone 10k XP (before I read the section on starting advanced characters; whoops) and we started rolling up characters.

My questions revolve around the differences between the system ToEE was written for (1st ed, right?) and ACKS. I can get around most of them (different monsters, spells, etc.), but I'd like to bring a few concerns to the wise denizens here.

Firstly, AC. I think I can just take 10 minus whatever the statblock has and make that ACKS AC, right? Complicating factors include whether all the armors are the same (I think Plate is -7 vice ACKS' 6?) and the bonuses for Dex being different. Can anyone please enlighten me on the differences between ACKS and [1st ed. I think] in this regard?

Secondly, teh phat lewts. ACKS rewards straight 1xp for 1gp recovered - reading the module I think it was written for more 1xp per 5 gp recovered. Is keeping the loot stat blocks as-is going to rocket my party's level into the stratosphere? (They might need it for the 4th floor, ha!) Also, are the monetary systems themselves equivalent? I felt like Gyax and Mentzer are just throwing double-handfuls of pp at the PCs, but maybe I'm just stingy.

Thirdly, does anyone whose run ToEE before have any advice, general or specific? I'm also a new GM so any advice on that is also certainly appreciated.

Thanks in advance!

-the Fool

I haven't personally run 1E ToEE, so these comments are general based on my experience in running a lot of 1E->ACKS conversions and a lot of modules written by Gary Gyax.

AC: ACKS AC = 10 minus 1E AC. Unless you have an excess of free time, I wouldn't worry about re-calculating the monster stat blocks other than that. Yes, there can be a 1 point difference between ACKS plate and 1E plate, and a 1 point difference for DEX 18 (-4 AC v. +3 AC). But that means the biggest difference is 10%.

Loot: My experience in running Gygax/Mentzer modules is that they tend to be more difficult than other adventures for similar level characters, and that they tend to give more treasure in exchange. As a result I generally see a higher body count, with faster leveling for the survivors.

I'd recommend you take the most minimalist approach you can to adapting the module, making only such changes as are strictly necessary.

wamba_the_fool then wrote:

Thanks for all the replies!

So to keep things simple I'll take the monster entries as they are in the module, AC = 10-%statblock entry%; I'll ignore the plate/Dex nuances. For attack throws I'll use the ACKS monster tables (by HD, right?). I won't worry about loot unless it actually starts becoming a problem (either too little or too much; we might have a 6th PC joining us so I doubt it'll actually be too much now).

I'll just handwave the differences in monsters and try to find loot/spells that are similar. (I didn't have too much trouble Googling for Keoghtom's Ointment, at least!)

Thanks again for the help! Any advice for running a dungeon crawl in general? Clever ways of keeping time? How exacting should I be regarding torches and rations?

Stay awesome,

-the Fool

Managing the logistics burden is one of the hardest challenges for the exploration-focused campaign. Opinions vary widely on how closely and carefully to track time.

I'm sure some GMs can do it in their head, and others can intuitively estimate it in ways that are fair for all. I can't! So I keep a notebook open during play in which I note down what the players do. (I use these to write up my actual-play reports later).

In the notebook, I mark the passage of time. During dungeon crawls, I hash-mark each turn until they reach six turns, then mark an hour, etc. I inform the PCs to scratch off a torch or flask of oil each hour.

When a spell with a duration is cast, I write down the spell, when it was cast, and when it will expire.

I don't necessarily do the above in real-time however. Dungeon/sandbox exploration tends to create decision points where the PCs need to stop, think, and discuss among themselves. That's when I get "caught up". (That has a secondary benefit of getting me to shut up and not interfere in their discussion).

Splitting Up Hit Dice: Mass and Fighting Ability

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/splitting-hit-dice-mass-and-fighting-ability>

December 23, 2013

Tag: **New Material**

Alex wrote:

D&D, and through descent, ACKS, uses Hit Dice that combine both the actual capacity to take physical damage ("mass") and the ability to avoid taking physical damage ("fighting ability"). The proportion which HD represent for any given creature are not always self-evident, but, e.g. a 9th level fighter's HD surely represent fighting ability and a 9HD elephant's HD surely represent mass.

Hit Dice also determine a creature's accuracy in combat. Always keeping in mind that armor makes the target harder to hit, accuracy in combat represents both fighting ability (hitting the target) as well as armor-penetration (breaking through a target's armor) from mass. The proportion which HD represent are, again, not self-evident, but presumably a 9th level fighter's attack throws have improved by means of fighting ability, while a 9HD elephant's attack throws are superior due to its ability to smash through puny man-sized armor.

The fact that Hit Dice include both mass and fighting ability is a masterful simplification but it creates many oddities that have plagued all D&D-like games since inception.

1. High HD animals have Olympian accuracy, even when attacking unarmored targets whose AC is derived from high DEX.
2. Lost hit points on creatures where they represent physical injury (e.g. elephants) recuperate at the same rate as lost hit points on characters where they represent mere fatigue and erosion of fighting ability.
3. When attacked by surprise or back-stabbed, characters can absorb lethal blows through superior fighting ability, defending themselves (as it were) against attacks they were unaware of.
4. Curative magic will restore morale and fatigue when cast on some creatures, physical damage when cast on other creatures; small, weak creatures can never benefit from a cure of serious or critical wounds as they are incapable of being dealt such wounds (too few HP).

The following house rules are intended to differentiate Mass and Fighting Ability.

Calculation of Mass HP and Fighting Ability HP.

1. For man-sized creatures (including most PCs)

$$\text{Mass HP} = \text{CON} / 2$$

2. For creatures of varying size with a known CON score,

$$\text{Mass HP} = (0.2) * (\text{weight}^{1/3}) * \text{CON}$$

3. For creatures of varying size without a CON score,

$$\text{Mass HP} = 2 * (\text{weight}^{1/3})$$

4. All remaining HP are Fighting Ability HP.

5. If a character has more Mass HP than he has actual HP (as might be the case for a high-CON mage) then reduce Mass HP to his actual HP. He will accumulate his remaining Mass HP as he advances in level. This represents a character who is out-of-shape, unhardened to battle, fearful of pain, etc.

EXAMPLES:

1. Marcus is a 7th Fighter with 18 CON. He has 54hp. Marcus has $(\text{CON}/2)$ 9 Mass HP. He has $(54-9)$ 45 Fighting Ability HP.

2. Theog is an Ogre with 11 CON. A 4HD+1 monster, he has 22hp. He weighs 1,000lb. Theog has $(0.2) * (1,000^{1/3}) * 11$ Mass HP, or 21 Mass HP. He has $(22-21)$ 1 Fighting Ability HP.

3. Dumbo is an Elephant with 9HD and 40hp. He weighs 9,000lb. Dumbo has $2 * (9,000^{1/3})$ Mass HP, or 41 Mass HP. Dumbo has 40 Mass HP (using the lower of actual and mass) and no Fighting Ability HP.

4. Simba is a Lion with 5HD and 25 HP. He weighs 500lb. Simba has $2 * (500^{1/3})$ Mass HP, or 16 Mass HP. Simba has 16 Mass HP and $(25-16)$ 9 Fighting Ability HP.

Differentiating Dodge Class and Armor Class

1. Armor Class is sub-divided into Dodge Class (DC) and Armor Class (AC).

2. Armor Class is improved by armor, shields, magical adjustments to armor and shields, Weapon & Shield proficiency, magical items "of armor", and spells that create magical armor or shields or render the subject invulnerable.

3. Dodge Class is improved by DEX, Bladedancer's Graceful Fighting, Swashbuckling proficiency, magical items and spells "of protection", and spells that improve AC through luck, speed, or divine favor.

EXAMPLE: Aurelyn is a 7th level bladedancer (Graceful Fighting +2). She has DEX 16 (+2) and Swashbuckling proficiency (+2). She wears Bracers of Armor AC 3 and a Ring of Protection +1. Her AC is 3 (from the bracers). Her DC is (2+2+2+1) 7.

4. Armor Class: Well-armored targets are harder to hit than lightly-armored ones. The target's Armor Class is added to the attack throw value necessary to hit it.

5. Dodge Class: Highly dexterous targets are harder to hit than sluggish ones. The target's Dodge Class is added to the attack throw value necessary to hit it.

Attack Throw and Armor Penetration

1. Since armor makes a target harder to hit, some portion of a creature's improvement in its attack throw actually represents its ability to break through armor. This factor will now be separately represented as "Armor Penetration".

2. Find a monster's Attack Throw by dividing its Fighting Ability Hit Points by 4.5 and using that value as its HD on the "Monster Attack Throws table" in the How to Attack section of ACKS.

a. If the monster has 4 or fewer Fighting Ability Hit Points, it attacks as a "Less than 1HD" Creature.

b. If the monster has effectively negative Fighting Ability Hit Points (e.g. its Mass HP exceeded its base Hit Points), then it attacks as a "Normal Man".

3. Find a monster's Armor Penetration by first dividing its Mass Hit Points by 4.5 and using that value as its HD on the "Monster Attack Throws table" in the How to Attack section of ACKS. This will give an attack throw value. Armor Penetration is equal to 11 minus this value.

4. Armor Penetration: When attacking, a character may ignore a number of points of the target's Armor Class equal to his Armor Penetration. Dodge Class is not affected by Armor Penetration.

EXAMPLE:

Theog the Ogre has 21 Mass HP and 1 Fighting Ability HP. With 1 Fighting Ability HP, he attacks as a 1HD or Less monster. $21 \text{ Mass HP} / 4.5 = 4.67$. Consulting the Monster Attack Throw table for "4+ to 5 HD" yields an attack throw of 6+. Theog's Armor Penetration is $(11-6) 5$ points. Theog is not very accurate (10+ attack throw), but he can smash through chainmail and shield (AC 5) like cloth.

Dumbo the Elephant has 40 Mass HP and no Fighting Ability HP. Dumbo attacks as a Normal Man, because his base HP were actually lower than his Mass! Dumbo's Armor Penetration is very good, though. $40 / 4.5 = 8.9$, putting him on the 7+ to 9 HD line for a 3+. That yields $(11-3) 8$ points of Armor Penetration. Dumbo is something of a wild and imprecise attacker but no mundane armor or shield is going to be useful against his titanic strength.

Simba the Lion has 16 Mass HP and 9 Fighting Ability HP. Simba attacks as a $(9 / 4.5 = 2)$ 2HD monster, with an attack throw of 9+. Simba's Armor Penetration is $(16 / 4.5 = 3.6; 3+ \text{ to } 4\text{HD attack throw } 7+; 11-7=4) 4$.

(The net effect of these rules is to make lightly-armored, dexterous heroes more advantaged versus slow-moving and clumsy monsters. A shirtless barbarian hero like Conan can actually fight a monster and win through virtue of his high DEX and Swashbuckling proficiency making him hard to hit. Armored characters are not worse off, of course.)

Combat, Mass HP, and Fighting Ability HP

1. Except where otherwise noted, damage is first dealt to Fighting Ability HP. When Fighting Ability HP are reduced to 0, remaining damage is dealt to Mass HP.
2. When a creature is reduced to 0 or fewer Mass HP, it is incapacitated and must roll on the Mortal Wounds table.
3. If a creature takes $1/4$ its Mass HP in one attack, it suffers a -2 penalty on all attack throws next round due to pain. (?)
4. If a creature takes $1/2$ its Mass HP in one attack, it must make a saving throw versus Death. If it fails, the creature collapses from shock. (?)

Critical Hits

1. An attack throw that exceeds the target value by 8 or more is a critical hit. The target must make a saving throw versus Death. On a failed saving throw, the attack deals double maximum damage to the target's Mass HP. On a successful saving throw, the attack deals maximum damage to the target's Fighting Ability HP.

EXAMPLE: Brad (10th level Explorer) is attacking Smog, a huge venerable dragon (65,000lb; Mass HP 40, Fighting Ability HP 50). Brad has 18 DEX and Missile Fighting proficiency, wields a +2 bow, and has been Blessed and Inspired with Courage. His attack throw is (4-3-1-1-2-1-1) -4. His +2 arrows will deal 1d6 (+1 +4 +1 +1) +8 damage. Smog has AC 12. Brad needs (-4+12) 8+ to hit and 16+ to critically hit. He rolls an 18, and critically hits! Smog must make a saving throw versus Death. Sadly Smog rolls a 2, and fails. Smog takes $6 \times 2 + 8 = 20$ hp to his Mass Hp. This is 1/2 Smog's Mass HP in one attack. Smog must make a saving throw versus Death. He fails again! Smog collapses from shock. Brad calls his friend, the bard Talkin, to write this crazy outcome down.

Surprise, Ambush, and Back-stabbing

1a. Any attack by surprise deals damage to Mass HP. (Hardcore/Gritty)

or

1b. An attack by surprise deals 10% damage to Mass HP and 90% damage to Fighting Ability HP. If the character has Ambush or Backstab, he deals a greater percentage to Mass HP, equal to 10% times his multiplier. (Heroic)

Healing

1. Mass HP heals at a rate of 20% of maximum per week of rest. This rate can be increased by Healing proficiency.

2. Fighting Ability heals at a rate of 20% of maximum per turn of rest.

3. Cure Light Wounds and similar magic instantly heals 20% of Mass HP. It can also heal certain permanent wounds: 26/3, 21-25/4, 16-20/5, and 11-15/6.

4. Cure Moderate Wounds instantly heals 40% of Mass HP. It can also heal these permanent wounds: 26/2, 21-25/3, 16-20/4, 11-15/5, 6-10/6.

5. Cure Major Wounds instantly heals 60% of Mass HP. It can also heal these permanent wounds: 26/1, 21-25/2, 16-20/3, 11-15/4, 6-10/5, 1-5/6.

6. Cure Serious Wounds instantly heals 80% of Mass HP. It can also heal these permanent wounds: 21-25/1, 16-20/2, 11-15/3, 6-10/4, 1-5/5.

7. Cure Critical Wounds instantly heals 100% of Mass HP. It can also heal these permanent wounds: 16-20/1, 11-15/2, 6-10/3, 1-5/4.

Healing permanent wounds using cure spells takes time equal to that listed by the Condition on the Mortal Wounds table. If there has been a limb loss, the lost limb must be available as the spells cannot regenerate, merely re-stitch.

Using a higher-level spell than the permanent wound requires increases the rate of recovery by one condition level.

Healing proficiency can "surgically" repair permanent wounds at the appropriate level through successful proficiency throws. Only one throw is permitted per wound, and the surgery must take place within one hour of the wound.

(In the genres of fantasy which these rules are intended to emulate, Restore Life and Limb will be unavailable, and critical hits will make permanent wounds more likely. These rules offer an alternative means by which such damage can be repaired).

Healing Fighting Ability HP

Presumably spells might exist to restore lost Fighting Ability HP, perhaps representing inspirational morale. Perhaps Bards can restore FAHP through song. TBD.

TBD

1. Poison, paralyzation, and energy drain - or "how are you suffering these consequences if you didn't actually get hit"
2. Smashing through armor, or "shouldn't two-handed swords get a bonus to hit"
3. Strength and attack throws, or "should strength apply to hit or to armor penetration"
4. Magic item bonus and attack throws, or "should magic weapons provide a bonus to hit or to armor penetration"

[NOTE: Due to the awkward acronym FAHP, I am changing the term Mass HP to Life Points and Fighting Ability Hit Points to Hero Points, or LP and HP].

ADVANCED/CRAZY/WEIRD IDEAS

1. Special Maneuvers: Special maneuvers (such as sunder or disarm) ignore Armor Class. Defense Class still applies. The target's Defense Class against the special maneuver is increased by +1 per 5 Hero Points [Fighting Ability HP] remaining. The target receives a saving throw v. Paralyzation to avoid the effect.

EXAMPLE: Marcus, a heroic warrior with AC 10, DC 0, 18 LP and 50 HP, is fighting a skilled duelist (attack throw 2+). The duelist decides to disarm Marcus. The duelist needs 2+, modified by 50HP/5, 10, or 12+. If the duelist hits, Marcus will have to make a save v. Paralyzation or be disarmed.

2. Smashing Through Armor: An attacker may reduce his weapon's damage dice by one die type to gain +1 to hit, or two dice type to gain +2 to hit. Weapons may not be reduced below 1d4.

EXAMPLE: Gallantine, a 1st level fighter (attack throw 10+) is wielding a two-handed sword (1d10 damage). He is fighting Morgex, in plate armor and shield (AC 7). He is having trouble hitting Morgex, so he decides to try to "smash through armor", reducing his weapon's damage by three die types (d10->d8->d6->d4) in exchange for a +3 to hit. Now he needs 14+ instead of 17+.

3. Poison, Paralyzation, and Energy Drain: A blow that misses due to DC has been dodged. A blow that misses due to AC has struck armor. A blow that hits and damages Hero Points has connected in some manner with the target, but it was parried or blocked. If the attacker's damage deals Poison, Paralyzation, or Energy Drain, the target must make the appropriate saving throw to see if he was nicked / touched in the course of his parry. [This is more-or-less how zombie movies work. The hero tends to make his saving throws and avoid being "bitten" even though he's clearly being beat-up during the fight.]

EXAMPLE: Lucas, an unarmored survivor of the ghoulish apocalypse (AC 0, DC 0, LP 5, HP 10) is attacked by a ghoul (attack throw 9+). The ghoul strikes and misses with two claws but hits with its bite. Lucas loses 4 HP. He must now save versus Paralyzation. If he succeeds, then the bite didn't break skin - e.g. he actually was hit by the creature's jaw bone slamming onto his forearm. If he fails, the bite broke skin and he is paralyzed.

4. Mage's Hero Points: A mage's hero points don't represent fighting ability so much as they represent the magical wards and enchantments that every mage of power surrounds himself with. Narration of the effects of hits versus the mage's Hero Points should describe sparks of magic, strange deflections in thin air, etc.

5. LP, HP, and Zero Level NPCs: Normal men have their Life Points. When they earn a level of experience, the hit die is gained as Hero Points. Starting PCs will thus have 1/2 CON LP and a die roll's worth of HP. Normal monsters have their Life Points and default Hero Points based on their innate ferocity (like lions). Monsters of above-average HD for their type, such as orc chieftains, gain their additional hit points as Hero Points. Heroic monsters (a dragon highly experienced in war, for instance) might also have additional HP in this manner.

6. Ability Score Bonuses to Life Points and Hero Points: Each level, up to 9th level, a character's Life Points are increased by 3 points, to a maximum of CON. Each level, up to 9th level, a character's Hero Points are increased by his WIS modifier. This (a) helps characters be a bit more survivable in the face of nasty critical hits, and (b) makes WIS an ability of more utility, and goes along with the idea that WIS improves saving throws.

EXAMPLE: Marcus has WIS 13 and CON 18. At 1st level he has 9 (one half CON) +3 (for one level) LP and 5 (roll of 1d8 +1 WIS modifier) HP. At 2nd level he gains 3 LP and (roll of 1d8+1 yielding a 6) 6 HP, for a total of 15 LP and 11 HP. At third level he reaches his maximum of 18 LP and gets another 1d8+1 HP, giving him (e.g.) 18 LP and 16 HP.

golan2072 then wrote:

I like the Mass HP/Fighting HP rules.

Does the Dodge/Penetration system require two rolls to hit (one to defeat the dodge, another to penetrate the armour)?

No, it's one attack throw. Here's an example. An ogre (attack throw 10+, armor penetration 4, damage 1d12) is attacking Aurelyn, a bladedancer (AC 2, DC 7, MHP 5, FAHP 15).

The ogre's attack throw target value is increased by 7 due to her DC. It is increased by (2-2) 0 from her armor. The ogre needs a 17+ to hit Aurelyn (20%).

Under traditional ACKS rules, the ogre would have had an attack throw of 6+ versus Aurelyn's AC of 9, and would have needed 15+ to hit her (30%). So the chances of Aurelyn being hit have been reduced by about 1/3.

I didn't mean to add the acronym "FAP" to the game.

Mass HP shall henceforth be called "Damage Points" (DP)
Fighting Ability HP shall henceforth be called "Hero Points" (HP)

jedavis then wrote:

I've seen Wound Points / Stamina for similar splits in other games (Traveller d20, SWd20, probably others). I like the idea here, but keeping armor penetration separate runs into the same issue it does in other systems where armor remains AC - limited conditional addition. Determining whether an attack hits now involves a roll, a subtract from Fighting to-hit, a query regarding value of armor worn by target, a subtraction / min / max operation (armor pen - armor value, min 0), an addition (of AP-AV to roll-THAC0), and another comparison with AC. That's a lot of extra work compared to the basic roll, subtract, report AC hit!

I actually like Golan's idea regarding separating to-hit and pen rolls. Two rolls is much easier to handle numerically - you roll 2d20 at the same time (in different, predesignated colors), perform two subtractions (your THAC0 and TPAC0), and then report a tuple "Hit AC n and penetrate armor m". The trick here is getting the constants right to keep the probabilities about the same as they originally were (or to ensure other intended outcomes).

As for TBDs:

* One could assume scratches and glancing blows; perhaps save at +4 if no body damage was inflicted?

* This is one place where separating hit and pen rolls makes life easier. Some weapons might have +hit (daggers, fast weapons), some might have +pen (warpicks, pikes).

* Seems to me that Str should apply to pen rather than hit, but that's a raw deal for fighters.

* This is the easy one - all of the above, in various combinations! It's magic, man. Some magic swords cut through armor like butter, some guide their wielder's hands. Plenty of room for variety in effects.

I am not a fan of splitting attacks into 2 rolls; largely because of the unexpected impact it has on the GM. For instance, when the GM is rolling for 5 orcs to attack a PC, he needs to only do the math once, but he has to roll 2 dice 5 times. Using multiple dice is faster in 1-on-1 situations where the odds are recalculated frequently but much slower as soon as you get into instances of multiple attacks under the same mathematical circumstances. My fights, at least, have a lot of the latter and not much of the former.

(I also don't think one can get the mathematics to work out the same very easily...or at least I've not been able to. The corner cases get weird).

In any event, I think the process would work as:

1. Player declares attack.
2. Judge indicates AC and DC.
3. Player reduces AC by his AP, adds remaining AC and DC to target value and rolls.
4. Player announces hit or miss.

It would NOT work well if AC is kept hidden, but perhaps that's a worthwhile trade-off for other interesting game mechanical benefits.

If I were to move further towards a simulationist perspective, I'd do it as follows.

1. Remove "Hero Points" or "Fighting Ability Points entirely" and simply track "Life Points" or Mass. Life Points would be equal to CON (or 2x the values in the earlier example).
2. Increase all damage by 1 die.
3. Characters have an Attack Throw and a Defense Throw. Attack Throw is as normal. Defense Throw is equal to Attack Throw +7. Reduce the target value by 1 for a shield (more if magical); by 1 for Weapon & Shield proficiency; by DEX mod; by Swashbuckling bonus; and by Graceful Fighting bonus.
4. To hit, a character must roll greater than his attack throw. A roll 8 or more points greater than his target value is a critical hit.
5. The target may then attempt to parry/dodge by rolling greater than its defend throw.
6. An unblocked hit deals damage to Life Points. But damage is reduced by the value of its Armor Class.
7. An unblocked critical hit does double damage and allows an additional attack against the target (if it is still alive). A critical hit blocked by a normal parry does normal damage but allows an additional attack. A critical hit blocked by a critical parry is blocked. A normal hit blocked by a critical parry results in a riposte from the defender (free attack). The riposte cannot be blocked.

8. The maximum number of cleaves, dodges, and ripostes a character may make per round is equal to level for fighters, 1/2 level for clerics/thieves, and 1 for mages.

EXAMPLE: A 5th level Bladedancer (DEX 16, CON 9, Leather Armor +1, 2 swords +1, Swashbuckling, Weapon Finesse) has Attack Throw (8-1-1-2-1-1) 2+, Defense Throw (8+7 - 2-1-1) 11+, Life Points 9, Armor Class 3. She has Swift Sword (2 attacks per round) and Striking, so she deals 3d6 damage per attack.

Her 5th level Fighter opponent (STR 16, CON 14 Plate +1, Shield +1, Sword +1, Weapon & Shield Proficiency) has Attack Throw (7-2-1) 4+, Defense Throw (7+7 - 1-1-1) 11+, Life Points 14, Armor Class 7. He deals 1d6+5 damage per attack.

They engage with Bladedancer winning the initiative. The Bladedancer makes her first attack, needing 2+ to hit and 10+ to crit. A roll of 6 is a hit. The Fighter parries, needing 11+. He rolls an 11 and parries. The Bladedancer makes her second attack and rolls a 9, a hit. The Fighter rolls a 9 to parry and fails. The Bladedancer rolls 3d6 for damage, yielding an 8; Subtracting 6 armor, the Fighter takes 2 HP of damage, and is down to 12.

It's now the Fighter's turn. He needs a 4+ to hit and 12+ to crit. He rolls an 8, a hit. The Bladedancer needs 11+ to parry, and rolls a 12. It's now the next round.

The Bladedancer wins the initiative and attacks. Her first attack throw is a 7, a hit. The Fighter's parry roll is a 20, a critical parry! This triggers a riposte. The Fighter's riposte is a 3, however, so he misses. The Bladedancer now makes her second attack. Her roll is a 9, so she hits. Incredibly, the Fighter rolls a 19, a critical parry, and ripostes again! His attack roll of 8 hits. The Bladedancer now parries, and rolls an 18--a parry, but not a critical one.

It's now the Fighter's turn. He rolls a 16, scoring a critical hit. The Bladedancer attempts to parry, but rolls a 9. She therefore takes double damage of $4+2+5+5=16$ points. Even reduced by her armor of 3 points, she is taken to -4 HP. The fight is over.

Warhammer-style Careers in ACKS

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/warhammer-style-careers-acks>

April 10, 2014

Tag: **New Material**

Alex wrote:

I think it would be possible to create a career-style progressions system for ACKS, not unlike Warhammer 1e/2e. Each career would equate to 1 level in 1 class.

Here's some examples:

FIGHTER

Gain 1d8 hit points

10% chance attract followers if a fortress built/owned

20% chance 1 general proficiency*

20% chance battlefield prowess

33% chance 1 fighter class proficiency*

66% chance +1 attack throws with axes in any armor and fighting style*

66% chance +1 attack throws with bows/crossbows in any armor and fighting style*

66% chance +1 attack throws with flails/hammers/maces in any armor and fighting style*

66% chance +1 attack throws with swords/daggers in any armor and fighting style*

66% chance +1 attack throws with spears/pole arms in any armor and fighting style*

66% chance +1 attack throws with bolas/darts/nets/slugs/saps/staffs in any armor and fighting style*

66% chance +1 saving throws*

Career Cost to Enter: $2,000xp \times 2^{(\# \text{ of prior careers} - 1)}$

MAGE

Gain 1d4 hit points

Gain 1 level of arcane spellcasting ability

Gain 1 level of magic research ability

10% chance to attract apprentices if a sanctum has been built/owned

15% chance 1 class proficiency*

20% chance 1 general proficiency*

33% chance +1 attack throws wielding quarterstaves, clubs, daggers, darts in no armor either one-handed or two-handed*

33% chance +1 saving throws*

Career Cost to Enter: $2,500xp \times 2^{(\# \text{ of prior careers} - 1)}$

THIEF

Gain 1d4 hit points

Gain 1 level of thief abilities

10% chance to read and cast magic scrolls

10% chance to attract apprentices if a hideout has been built

20% chance 1 general proficiency*

25% chance to read languages

25% chance 1 thief class proficiency*

50% chance +1 attack throws wielding one-handed weapons, either one-handed or dual wielded, in leather or lighter*

50% chance +1 attack throws wielding missile weapons, in leather or lighter*

50% chance +1 saving throws*

Career Cost to Enter: $1,250xp \times 2^{(\# \text{ of prior careers} - 1)}$

*Automatic if this is your first career.

EXAMPLE: Duran selects Fighter as his 1st career. He gains 1d8 hit points, 1 general proficiency, 1 fighter proficiency, +1 to saving throws, and +1 to attack throws in a variety of weapons. The cost to enter is 0. He chooses Fighting Style (Two Weapon Fighting) and Riding as his proficiencies.

After accumulating some XP, he selects Thief as his 2nd career. It costs 1,250xp to enter. He gains 1d4 hit points. He gains 1 level of thief abilities, so he is effectively a 1st level thief on the table. He rolls for other bonuses. A roll of 80 means no read magic ability; a roll of 64 means no read languages; a roll of 54 means no general proficiency; a roll of 66 means no thief proficiency; a roll of 39 grants +1 attack throws with one-handed weapons in leather single or dual wielded; a roll of 44 grants +1 with missile weapons in leather or lighter; a roll of 65 grants no save bonus.

Duran would now fight with...

Attack throw 10+ using an axe in plate armor (+1 from fighter)

Attack throw 9+ using a sword in leather armor (+1 from fighter, +1 from thief)

Attack throw 7+ using 2 swords in leather armor (+1 from fighter, +1 from thief, +1 from 2 weapons, +1 from proficiency)

Etc.

Unified Saving Throws

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/unified-saving-throws>

June 28, 2014

Tag: **New Material**

nDervish wrote:

When trying to decide between turning to ACKS or Astonishing Swordsmen & Sorcerers of Hyperborea for my OSR gaming needs, one of the things weighing heavily in AS&SH's favor was that it handles saving throws in a unified/simplified manner. I'd like to adapt that to ACKS, but saving throw progressions are part of ACKS' class balancing, so it would need to be done carefully to avoid upsetting that balance.

In short, the AS&SH system is:

- Each character has a single "Saving Throw" (SV) stat. Level 1 characters have SV 16+ and it improves by one on every odd-numbered level regardless of class.*
- There are still five saving throw categories and each class gives a +2 bonus to saves in each of two categories. For example, Fighters get +2 to Death and Transformation saves, while Magicians get +2 against Devices and Sorcery.*

And that's pretty much it, in contrast to ACKS' assigning saves to each category independently, with each class starting out with different average saves (Fighters start with an average save of 15.6, while Mages average 12.8) and then improving at different rates (while Fighters start with the worst saves, they end up with the best of the main four classes at level 14 because their saves improve more frequently than anyone else).

Looking at Clerics and Thieves (chosen because they use the same "improve every odd-numbered level" progression as AS&SH), Clerics start with an average save of 13.4 and Thieves with 14.2. So, how badly would it break the math and class balancing to start all classes with a save of 14+, improving every other level, with the following class-based modifiers:

Fighter: +2 Petrification/Paralysis and Poison/Death

Mage: +2 Staffs/Wands and Spells

Cleric: +2 Poison/Death and Spells

Thief: +2 Petrification/Paralysis and Blast/Breath

Any classes with saving throw bonuses as a class feature (e.g., dwarves) would, of course, still get those same bonuses in addition to the standard pair of +2s.

Aside from simplifying things, using a unified progression also means that classes outside the main four can choose which two saves they gain the +2 bonus on rather than being tied to having saves just like one of the main four. For example, perhaps Paladins might get +2 to save vs. Petrification/ Paralysis and Spells.

So... Good idea? Bad idea? Horribly broken idea? Suggested improvements?

Here is a simple system you can try:

1. Fighters start with save 15+ and improve by 1 point each time attack throw improves. Fighters get +2 saving throw versus Paralyzation.
2. Thieves start with save 14+ and improve by 1 point each time attack throw improves. Thieves get +2 saving throw versus Blast/Breath.
3. Clerics and Mages start with save 13+ and improve by 1 point each time attack throw improves. Clerics get +2 saving throw versus Poison/Death while Mages get +2 saving throw versus Spells.

Any effect which is save v. Death or save v. Paralyzation becomes "save at +2". Any effect which is save v. Spell becomes "save at -2".

EXAMPLE:

Marcus is a 4th level fighter. His saving throw is 13+. (15+, improved once at 2nd level and once at 4th level).

- When saving against a special maneuver, he needs 9+. (+2 and +2)
- When saving against death magic, he needs 11+. (+2)
- When saving against a fireball, he needs 13+. (0)
- When saving against charm person, he needs 15+. (-2)

nDervish then wrote:

Thanks for the suggestion!

You may have noticed in my reply to Beragon that one of the major things I prefer about the AS&SH system is that the base save value is strictly level-based and improves at the same rate regardless of your class. But, in your suggestion, you had different classes starting with different base save values, which then improve along with their attack throws. Was this just to try to keep the math and balancing closer to the existing ACKS saving throw rules or is there an underlying fundamental reason for why, e.g., Fighters should start out with the worst saves, but they improve faster and eventually end up with the best saves?

There is an underlying fundamental reason for it. At 1st level, fighters are relatively the most powerful class. At 14th level, fighters are arguably the weakest class.

Giving fighters weaker saving throws at low level keeps them more balanced in the early game. Giving fighters great saving throws at high level keeps them more balanced in the late (e.g. less likely to expire to a spell).

It also represents the fact that mages, clerics, and thieves are spending their time working on other areas (spells, skills, turning undead), while fighters are focused on their combat prowess and toughness.

Finally, the rate of progression of saving throws is wedded to the rate of progression of proficiencies. If you create a symmetry across classes in saving throws, you break the symmetry with proficiencies.

Most of the ACKS design is very tightly coupled together so house-rules that change core mechanics of the game can have odd impacts in unexpected ways. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't house rule, just be aware the impact can spill over in unexpected ways. (A classic example was how 3.5's new saving throw system made wizards radically more powerful than they had been in 1e/2e).

Rate of Progression

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/rate-progression>

July 03, 2014

Tag: **Q&A**

golan2072 wrote:

Preparing for my Barbarian Conqueror King campaign (starting August 13th, 2014!), I was asked by my players how quickly does one progress in levels. How many sessions per level (in 3.5E D&D this is about 4 per level IME), and how much in-game time, including downtime for a campaign? I do like the idea, though, of high-level play being somewhat slower in terms of game-world time, with players spending whole seasons setting up and running their strongholds...

Auran Empire, 14th level after 101 sessions = 7.2 sessions per level

Opelenean Nights, 9th level after 60 sessions = 6.67 sessions per level

Historically in my campaigns:

For the first 3 levels it's about 1 level per 4 sessions (~12 sessions).

For the next 3 levels it's about 1 level per 6 sessions (~ 18 sessions).

For levels 7+ it's about 1 level per 8 sessions.

Alt. Save System

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/alt-save-system>

July 14, 2014

Tag: **Insight**

staticispunk wrote:

What would people think of a save system in which:

- 1) All characters use the middle value of their current saves for all types of effects*
 - 2) Dex, Con, or Wis are applied as modifiers according to the kind of effect and how the character avoids it (effectively Fort/Ref/Will)*
 - 3) Characters receive a bonus or penalty to the save according to the difference between their HD and the attacker's HD. Traps etc. are considered to always be equal to the character's HD.*
- Mainly the first and second point. I can take or leave the ability mods. Mostly I'm thinking of getting away from the 5 effects system.*

Haven't play-tested any of this, just brainstorming.

Such a system will surely work; it does work, after all, in 3.5.

Therefore I can merely explain why I did not use the Fort/Ref/Will save system in ACKS.

I think it made concrete what is necessarily abstract. To me the classic example of a saving throw is the example of a hero fighting a zombie in any George Romero horror movie. Let's compare two different models.

3.5E: "If the zombie successfully hits its target, the target must make a Fort Save DC 25. If the saving throw fails, the target is infected and will become a zombie in 1d6 hours.

ACKS: "If the zombie successfully hits its target, the target must make a saving throw versus Death. If the saving throw fails, the target is infected and will become a zombie in 1d6 hours.

Note how in the 3.5E model, the zombie infection requires a Fortitude Save. That's how 3.5E models diseases and poisons: You've been exposed, but your toughness and high Constitution might save.

Yet in Romero movies, a hero does not survive the zombie apocalypse by shrugging off the infection (a Fort save); no, anyone who is bitten is inevitably infected. Instead the hero survives the zombie apocalypse by never getting bitten at all! He might not get bitten because...

-
- He is very lucky
 - At the last minute the zombie's teeth bit on his thick leather glove and didn't break the skin
 - He maneuvered in such a way that the zombie was able to body-slam him but not to bite him

How the hero avoids getting bitten will depend on the type of hero he is. All of these abstractly factored into "saving throw v. Death".

(Also note that the hero will still "lose hp" when fighting a zombie - thrown into the wall, knocked sideways, etc. The monster's attack throw determines whether the hero takes damage; the hero's saving throw determines whether his skin was broken by the bite.)

Thus, the seemingly arbitrary difference in the game mechanics actually models a totally different in-game reality. In one system, the hero was bit but somehow not infected. In the other system the hero was hit but not bit, for a reason that is defined by the Judge in light of the situation and character.

Perhaps a system of "single save with ability score modifiers" could work if the Judge requires that the player explain how his character is avoiding the threat and then uses the ability score which is most appropriate. ("I try to roll away before it can bite me!"-DEX bonus; "My thick-as-leather Dwarven hide canna be pierced by no girly elf-bite" - CON bonus).

Super-Exact Cleric Population Breakdowns for ACKS

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/gearing-try-acks-again-have-misc-questions>

July 14, 2014

Tag: **Insight**

This was written in the middle of a different discussion.

Alex wrote:

Here are the super-exact population breakdowns for ACKS from my behind-the-scenes workbook.

In a population of around 29,394,766 people (~ 6 million families), there will be around ~ 12,000,000 adults (2 adults with 3 dependents).

Level	Number	Number of Clerics
0th	9,157,194	732,576*
1st	1,655,000	331,000
2nd	601,818	120,364
3rd	218,843	43,769
4th	79,579	15,916
5th	28,938	7,234
6th	10,523	2,631
7th	3,827	957
8th	1,391	348
9th	506	126
10th	184	46
11th	67	17
12th	24	6
13th	9	2
14th	3	1

*0th level Clerics would be lay priests, deacons, local pastors, and so on.

So in a population of 30,000,000, there will be 1,500 7th level or higher Clerics.

Assume an average life expectancy of 60 years, and you will have an annual death rate of 500,000 per year. There will be 333 deaths per cleric, or roughly 1 death per day per cleric. It is therefore feasible that all non-age-related death could be prevented by clerical magic in ACKS.

I agonized over this fact for a LONG time. One solution would have been to switch the cleric spell progression such that 5th level spells become available at 9th level. That reduces the number of clerics able to cast Restore Life and Limb down to 200, meaning that there are 6.8 deaths per cleric per day, so only the top 15% would have "clerical life insurance".

However, I ultimately didn't go that route. I still internally weigh whether distance, injury penalties, and aging are sufficient. By which I mean...

Distance: A kingdom of 30,000,000, assuming a population density similar to that of ancient Rome, occupies 600,000 square miles. That means there is 1 cleric of 7th level or higher per 400 square miles, or 20 miles. So that means it's going to be at least 1 day of travel, and likely 2 (with all factors included), to get the cleric.

Aging and Injury: Middle-aged adults will have an average -1 CON penalty, old -2, and ancient -3. Assuming 50% of life is 1-35 and the remainder is at the older ages, you're at an average -1 penalty. Most 0 level characters will have 3hp. Aging penalties and low hp penalties will lead to bad penalties on the Mortal Wounds table, and likely put them in the -1 half of the table. They are likely to end up with penalties on Tampering with Mortality of -2 to -5.

So most people will go into Tampering With Morality table with rolls of -4 to -9. They will get +4 from the spellcaster's level, putting them at 0 to -5. The odds of coming back hideously deformed, mad, or cursed are quite high. But if you've got a good Wisdom, have a Cleric handy, and didn't get too mauled, then, yes, you're likely to come back relatively safe.

I sometimes think it would be useful to have some dials for these factors, like a "Survivability Dial" and "Restorability Dial". The Survivability dial (-5 to +5) applies to all rolls on the Mortal Wounds chart while the Restorability dial applies to rolls on the Tampering With Mortality chart.

Then you could have:

Fantasy Vietnam: -5 Survivability, -5 Restorability

Swords & Sorcery: +5 Survivability, -5 Restorability

Classic Fantasy: +0 Survivability, -0 Restorability

Story of ACKS 4E FATE Edition: +5 Survivability, +5 Restorability

Advanced Domain Rules

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/advanced-domain-rules>

July 21, 2014

Tag: **New Material**

Alex wrote:

Perhaps I've been reading too much Harn Manor lately. Opinions solicited.

HENCHMEN EXPECTATIONS

Once a character acquires a realm large enough to provide him with campaign XP (e.g. domain exceeds the character's GP Threshold), his henchmen will expect the lord to assign them a domain from the realm to manage. Moreover, the henchmen will expect that the domains they are assigned will be appropriate to their own level. If a particular vassal domain's income is less than the henchman's GP Threshold, he will begrudge his lord's penuriousness, and his loyalty may be compromised.

To determine if a vassal begrudges his lord, consult the XP from Domain and Mercantile Income table. Starting on the first row, move down the GP Threshold column until the listed GP Threshold value exceeds the domain income for the vassal's domain (which may be 0). Stop there and write down the class level associated with the GP Threshold on that row. If the class level you wrote down is less than the vassal's actual level, his morale score is reduced by 2 per point of difference.

EXAMPLE: Duke Robert is a 9th level fighter with a domain of 2,500 families. Duke Robert wants to keep his own domain as large as possible to maximize his own XP, so he decides to give his four henchmen quite small domains.

One of his henchman is Howard, a 7th level fighter. Howard is assigned a domain of 50 families to rule. After garrison, taxes, tithes, and stronghold upkeep, Howard's domain has a domain income of 315gp per month. Consulting the XP from Domain and Mercantile Income table, the Judge finds the first GP Threshold which exceeds 315gp is 650gp. The class level associated with that GP Threshold is 5th level. 5th level is two levels below Howard's 7th level, so Howard's morale score is reduced by 4.

Duke Robert learns of Howard's unhappiness and decides to increase his domain to a more satisfactory size. He increases Howard's domain from 50 families to 400 families, which increase Howard's domain income to 2,560gp. Consulting the XP from Domain and Mercantile Income table, the Judge sees that Howard is now satisfied.

Duke Robert realizes his other three 7th-level vassals will be as upset as Howard if he doesn't take care of them, so he assigns 400 families each to each of his three other vassals. Robert now has a personal domain of 900 families and four vassals, including Howard, each ruling 400 families.

Assigning a vassal a domain with a domain income greater than his own GP Threshold does not decrease the vassal's loyalty, but it doesn't increase it. Perhaps the vassal develops an overinflated ego, assuming that his lord is desperate for his services, or resent the excess responsibility being thrust upon. History is filled with betrayals by trusted henchmen shown a little too much favor...

NON-HENCHMEN VASSALS

Since the number of henchmen any character may employ is limited to between 1 and 7 (depending on his Charisma), very powerful characters may find that they have more domains under their control than can be managed even with all of their henchmen. Rather than follow the procedure in ACKS of assigning multiple vassal domains to a henchmen, who then has to sub-assign the vassal domain to his own henchmen, the ruler may assign vassal domains to non-henchmen.

Non-henchmen rulers have a base morale of -2. During any month, a non-henchman vassal can only be safely asked to perform one duty for each favor given (there is no "free" duty, as there is with a henchman). If the ruler demands duties in excess of this total, the non-henchman vassal's loyalty must be checked on the Henchman Loyalty table for each extra duty.

NON-CONTIGUOUS DOMAINS

The maximum size of a domain is 500 square miles (1 24-mile hex, 16 6-mile hexes, or 576 1-mile hexes). Typically a domain will consist of one or more 6-mile hexes. Small domains might consist of one or more 1-mile hexes. Regardless of the size of the domain, it is easier to manage if its entire area is contiguous. However, for various reasons of geography, conquest, or feudalism, it is possible for a domain to be (or become) noncontiguous.

If an entire domain is encompassed within the same 24-mile hex, but some hexes of the domain are noncontiguous, then the domain suffers a -1 penalty to its base domain morale. If the domain is spread across two 24-mile hexes, then the domain suffers a -2 penalty to its base domain morale; if spread across three 24-mile hexes, it suffers a -3 penalty to its base domain morale; and so on.

The contiguous area of the domain which encompasses the lord's stronghold is called the lord's demesne. Each separate and noncontiguous area of the domain is called a manor. A lord may purposefully divide contiguous areas into manors if desired.

EXAMPLE: Jory's domain of 300 families is spread across 3 24-mile hexes. Hex #1 contains the domain's stronghold, along with 200 families in two contiguous 6-mile hexes. Hex #2 contains 50 families in one 6-mile hex. Hex #3 contains 30 families in one 6-mile hex, and another 20 families in another, noncontiguous 6-mile hex. The domain therefore consists of one demesne of 200 families and three manors, of 50 families (in Hex #2), 30 families (in Hex #3), and 20 families (also in Hex #3). Jory's domain suffers a -3 penalty to its base morale because it is spread across three 24-mile hexes.

Officer Title	Level	Cost/Month	Stewardship	Manor Home
Steward	3 rd	100gp	25 families	500gp
Steward	4 th	200gp	50 families	1,000gp
Steward	5 th	400gp	100 families	2,000gp

The morale penalty on a noncontiguous domain can be alleviated by employing a **steward** on each manor. A steward is a specialist who organizes and manages a manor for an absentee lord. Stewards range in level from 3rd to 5th level and can manage manors of between 25 and 100 families. Manors of larger than 100 families require multiple stewards. Each steward must be provided with a manor home of the minimum value listed and paid the monthly wage shown on the accompanying table.

If desired, manors can be tracked as separate "mini-domains" or can be tallied as part of the overall domain. If the former, treat the manor home as the manor's stronghold. If the latter, the cost of manor homes is added to the domain's stronghold value for upkeep purposes. In either case, the steward's wages count as an expense for purposes of calculating domain income. Families in a manor must still be protected with a garrison and feasted with festivals, as usual.

EXAMPLE: In the 50-family manor in Hex #2, Jory builds a 1,000gp manor home and installs a 4th level steward. In the 30-family manor in Hex #3, Jory also builds a 1,000gp manor home and installs a 4th level steward. In the 20-family manor in Hex #3, Jory builds a 500gp manor home and installs a 3rd level steward. Jory's stronghold value is increased by 2,500gp for purposes of upkeep, and he must subtract (200+200+100) 500gp per month from his domain income to pay his stewards. However, his domain morale penalty is removed.

The intent of the above rules is to simulate the following real-world conditions of rulership:

1. The fact that feudalism arose out of necessity to maintain the loyalty of powerful henchmen, who otherwise would prove rebellious, mutinous and unhappy. (This is doubly highlighted by the fact that non-henchmen vassals are quite disloyal (-2).) Conversely, a ruler needs to make sure his vassals don't receive so much of his realm as to be more powerful than he.
2. The fact that many rulers had far more direct vassals (or tenants-in-chief) than ACKS allows. William the Conqueror had dozens of direct vassals. Conversely, most of these rulers frequently dealt with rebellion when they asked for tribute or troops, as was the case in England and the Holy Roman Empire.
3. The fact that historically, a king, duke, baron, or earl's "domain" might actually consist of many manors spread over a wide area. These manors would not be subinfeudated - they were still ruled by the noble, albeit indirectly via a steward - but they were not contiguous domains.

nDervish then wrote:

Henchman Expectations:

I don't particularly like this one.

First off, it's too likely for players to be screwed by the math, which they'll hate, even if it may be somewhat intentional. e.g., A lord with a total realm income of 14,000gp and three level 8 henchmen (5kgp threshold) could turn his entire realm over to them, leaving no personal domain for himself, and at least one of them still wouldn't be happy. Henchmen are already limited by CHA, the chance of leaving when they level up or suffer calamities, the cost of maintaining them (wages/loot shares), etc. There's no need to turn them into an outright liability.

Second, there's an established fictional (and, I presume, historical, though I can't verify that offhand) tradition of powerful protagonists traveling with a band of slightly-less-powerful, but not enfeoffed, retainers. Not every knight demands to be a noble.

Finally, some henchmen are of classes that aren't that into domain rulership in the first place. A Master Thief may prefer to focus on building up a syndicate and expanding it into a major guild rather than going legit and managing peasants. The reclusive Wizard who just wants to be left in peace while he does undisturbed research in his tower is an extremely well-established trope. Etc. Henchmen of these sorts would seem more likely to refuse rulership than to demand it.

Non-henchman Vassals:

Makes sense and seems consistent with the rules for mercenary commanders in D@W. More importantly, it fills a potential need for added flexibility in handling large realms. I like it, even if I don't expect to ever see it actually used in my own game.

Noncontiguous Domains:

Makes sense, adds flexibility, and seems more likely to come up in actual play than the non-henchman vassals.

nDervish, your comments are well-taken.

Regarding henchmen expectations, my concern is that without some mechanic to enforce this, situations like these can occur:

1. PCs can assign a large domain to a low-level henchman so he would quickly level up, while bringing their high-level henchman with them on adventures.
2. PCs can give domains to characters they had built to be "domain studs" (leadership, command, CHA), disregarding loyal henchmen who had risked their lives for them.
3. PCs will tend to keep as personal domains much larger domains than is assumed in ACKS or typical in the historical sources it's based on.

Perhaps as a modification of henchmen expectations:

Once a character acquires a realm large enough to provide him with campaign XP (e.g. domain exceeds the character's GP Threshold), his henchmen will expect the lord to assign them a domain from the realm to manage. Moreover, the henchmen will expect that the domains they are assigned will be appropriate to their own level. If a character's realm is providing him with campaign XP, while his henchman's domain is not (because the vassal domain's income is less than the henchman's GP Threshold), the henchman will begrudge his lord's penuriousness, and his loyalty may be compromised.

I'll give further thought to ideas of whether, e.g., mages or thieves as henchmen would feel the same.

How to Simulate Games/Sporting Events

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/how-simulate-gamesporting-events>

July 31, 2014

Tag: **New Material**

Kiero wrote:

*Something I want to put into Mercenary, Liberator, Tyrant is sporting competition, given how important it was in Greek culture. Affluent men trained in the gymnasium, it was one of the three pillars of Greekness, and the best competed in the formal **Panhellenic Games**. There were four big ones, arranged so that there were games every year, though the Olympic Games were the most prestigious. That's without informal games that might be called at any large gathering of Greeks (such as when an army or fleet was mustered).*

What I want is a similar level of structure to that which you have with combat, not just a single roll to see who won, but something that gives you some options and a little tactical play.

Some of the events don't need anything additional - there's already rules for unarmed combat and wrestling. But the rest do, to my mind.

First up, racing. Bear in mind in all these events, there are no rules against contact with the other runners, though it's considered bad form. No doubt the Running Proficiency gives significant advantages here, but I'd want to involve all three physical ability scores in some sort of assessment of athletic potential.

*The **stadion** was a 200m-ish sprint along a straight line. I can see four parts to this; the start, as in reacting to the starter's order; the push off to get going; the main run; and the finish.*

*The **diaulos** was a 400m-ish run, often in two halves, out to a post, around and back. So you've got the same two-part start, the first straight, the turn around the post, the second straight and the finish.*

*The **dolichos** was a longer-distance event, covering about 3 miles. It started and ended in the stadium, but would wind its way around the whole site and take in significant landmarks like temples. This is much more of a stamina-based event than the other two.*

*The last race was the **hoplitodromos**, a single or double **diaulos** in full armour, including shield. Lots of hazards in this one, even aside from people using their shields to knock people over or otherwise hinder them, falling over or dropping your shield and becoming an obstacle to anyone behind you was a constant threat.*

Field events were the long jump (that could be resolved in a single roll to establish how good your jump was), discus throw (again a throw to say how far you threw) and javelin (same again). Though there might be a tactical element with how close to the line you're willing to go to extend your jump for the first.

*Lastly, **chariot racing**. I'd call this an extension of whatever rules we came up with for racing, but with added control-of-horses and interaction with other drivers peril. There were two races, two-horse and four-horse. Both took in twelve laps around a track where they went around a post at either end.*

Thoughts?

Totally just making this up on the fly...

Start: An initiative roll, modified by DEX. Write down the character's initiative number.

Push-Off: A proficiency throw of 14+, modified by DEX. Characters who fail the throw must either "fall behind" or lose 1 point of CON per point by which they missed the target value exerting themselves to stay in the race.

Main Run: A proficiency throw of 14+, 18+ if the character has fallen behind. The throw is modified by STR. Characters who fail the throw either "fall behind" or lose 1 point of CON per point by which they missed the target value.

Characters reduced to less than 3 CON drop out of the race. Characters with a modified roll of 0 or less sprain an ankle or otherwise are out of the race.

Finish: A proficiency throw of 14+, 18+ if the character has fallen behind. The throw is modified by current CON. Characters who pass the throw arrive in initiative order. Then characters who fail the throw arrive in initiative order. If initiative is tied, the race is tied.

EXAMPLE: A race with 4 runners.

Achilles - STR 18, DEX 18, CON 18.

Basileus - STR 13, DEX 13, CON 13.

Calliopes - STR 11, DEX 18, CON 9.

Davidus - STR 18, DEX 7, CON 15.

Start: All runners roll initiative. Achilles rolls a 5, modified to 8; Basileus a 4, modified to 5; Calliopes a 5, modified to 8; and Davidus a 1, modified to 0.

Push-Off: Achilles rolls a 10, modified to 13 by DEX. He fails by 1. He expends 1 point of CON, reducing him to 17. Basileus rolls a 14, modified to 15 and succeeds. Calliopes rolls a 14, modified to 17, and succeeds. Davidus rolls an 8, modified to an 7. He fails by 7. He chooses to fall behind rather than lose 7 CON, counting on his STR to see him through the next round.

Main Run: Achilles rolls a 7, modified to 10 by his STR. He fails by 4. He expends 4 points of CON, reducing him to 13. Basileus rolls a 6, modified by 1 to 7, and fails by 7. He expends 7 points of CON, reducing him to 6 (ouch!). Calliopes rolls a 3, and fails by 11. He would have to drop out of the race, so he instead falls behind. Davidus rolls a 20, modified to 23, and catches up!

Finish: Achilles current CON is 13. He rolls a 6, modified to 7, and fails. Basileus' current CON is 6 (-1). He rolls a 2, -1, for 1. He fails.

Calliopes rolls an 18, which is what he needed because he had fallen behind!

Davidus rolls a 2, modified by 1 to 3. He fails.

The final result is Calliopes first, then a second wave of Achilles, Basileus and Davidus.

Stacking Divine Spells

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/stacking-divine-spells>

August 31, 2014

Tag: **Q&A**

susan_brindle wrote:

There are four or five different divine spells that all provide minor bonuses to attack throws, can you be under the influence of all of them at once? (IE: A cleric wants to be sure his friend will win the fight, so he casts Bless, Prayer, and then starts a Holy Chant. Is that worth +3?)

Unless otherwise noted, everything stacks.

Adventurer, Conquerer, Lawyer: Is This Okay?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/adventurer-conquerer-lawyer-okay>

October 07, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Pope Nag wrote:

Inspired by the ACKS rules, I created a setting for my campaign. It started off with a general outline and a worldmap, but it quickly got out of hand.

Combining all my notes and ideas, I am writing a sourcebook / players' guide for my campaign setting, Dawn of Kings. Obviously, I will want to include some houserules, etc. In a large part, though, the system will be 'pure' ACKS.

Now, if (and that's a big if) I were to publish this, would it be okay to mention ACKS? You've done a great job with the system, and I really don't want to infringe your copyright.

Would it be okay to say something like: okay, Dawn of Kings is an unofficial sourcebook for ACKS. General ACKS rules apply, except (houserule 1, houserule 2, etc).

Would it be okay to say: this works like the X proficiency from ACKS, except Y - without actually printing the exact rules of the proficiency?

I'm looking for general guidelines on what you would consider 'not done'.

Thanks in advance!

There is a compatibility license at the back of ACKS that is very easy to qualify under, and the rules themselves are open-source. If you want to chat further, drop me an email at amacris at gmail dot com and I'm sure we can work something out!

I'd actually be really fired up if people started using ACKS et al as the basis for more content. I know that many segments of the industry (Wizards, etc.) have moved away from seeing OGL as a good thing, but nothing would make me happier as a designer than to have my work become a platform for bigger and better things.

Help Needed - Pace of Advancement

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/dwimmermount/help-needed-pace-advancement>

December 29, 2014

Tag: **Insight**

hworth99 wrote:

Looking for help. I am running a Dwimmermount campaign and we are about 16 hours in. At this point, the party has explored about 1/2 of the first level and none of the characters have hit level 2. I feel that the group is pretty balanced in terms of role playing (we aren't spending hours in Muntburg talking).

Is this level of progression pretty normal? I feel like we are crawling at this point and I don't want my players to become discouraged if they feel that they are not accomplishing enough. Just wanted to see if others thought this was typical, or if perhaps I am missing something.

Thanks

16 hours of gameplay without advancing to level 2 is a bit slow. It could simply be bad luck, if they've explored half the level but only found one-fourth of the treasure.

It may be that they haven't fully grasped the implications of XP-for-GP. If not, then certainly encourage them to be looking harder for those treasure hoards.

Have they created a map? Maps can be sold in town for a respectable amount of GP.

Have they discovered any secrets of value so far? Again, that can be worth GP.

How many casualties has the group endured? In my campaigns, fatalities at 20-40% are not unusual in the ascent from 1st to 2nd level. If the group has played 16 hours (3-4 sessions) with few or no casualties, and also little to no XP, then they are likely proceeding quite cautiously. Cautious play tends to reduce the rate of leveling early on, though it keeps the group alive.

In any case, advancement in ACKS (and LL/BX/etc), especially in a megadungeon setting, will tend to be more "chaotic" than in games with encounter-based XP. It's entirely possible for the group to advance slowly for several sessions, then find itself with an abundance of riches.

Oh, one additional note. If your PCs are being cautious, one way to encourage PCs to become a bit more...aggressive...in their dungeon-crawling is to introduce rival adventuring parties into the mix.

In my "Bloody Band" Auran Empire game, I created a rival group of adventurers called "Imperial Vanguard". Occasionally (random rolls) IV would beat the PCs to a dungeon and the PCs would find the whole dungeon swept clean of treasure (and, literally, swept, with clearly painted door markings warning of hazards, and neatly buried bodies outside with little gravestones. I Rped Imperial Vanguard as professional, perfectionist by-the-book paladins just to be more irksome.) The extent to which the adventurers would take risks 'to make sure Imperial Vanguard didn't get OUR treasure' was awesome.

Dwimmermount has a bunch of pre-made rival parties to use.

Jard then wrote:

I have a group of cautious PCs, I'm going to have to cook up my own version of IV to goad them along.

Be sure to have the rival group be irritating in some way. It really makes it more fun. Have them be really sloppy, and litter the dungeon with graffiti, and crumbs and pee everywhere; or super-neat; or have them hire bards to publish manuscripts of their adventures, whatever.

Good luck!

Chapter 2: Characters

Read Languages and Illiteracy

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/read-languages-and-illiteracy>

May 09, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

bzardhands wrote:

Does an Int lower than 9 impact the Read Language thief skill?

I'm kind of amused by the idea that a character would be just as likely to make sense of a dead tongue as they would their native language, but I'm not entirely certain it's intended to work that way.

As written, a thief with INT 8 or less would be unable to read anything unless he made his Read Languages check.

If I were judging the PC, I'd allow him to automatically succeed on reading his native language, though, just to keep things from being too silly.

Nature and the Law/Chaos axis

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/nature-and-lawchaos-axis>

May 11, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Rodriguez wrote:

What is the stance of "nature" on the forces of law and chaos? Considering the monsters in the rulebook it seems that the implied setting with its neutral fey and Centaurs and lawful unicorns, pegasus and treants is more leaning towards pro humanity.

Did the struggle of "wilderness vs civilization" ever came up above the level of "local druid doesn't like the wood cutters"? Is that a topic in the Auran Empire Setting?

I think law, neutrality, and chaos would all claim "nature" to be on their side, but in a different way.

Law would claim that "natural law" exists, that humans are born with an innate moral sense, that by nature, humans are social animals designed to live in civilized polities, and that as such we should claim and tame wilderness as a moral good. "I have built a city on this mountain top because it is right and proper that the domain of man conquer and tame the frontier. It is a grand accomplishment testifying to the power of civilization."

Neutrality would claim that while there is "natural law," it's look out for yourself; that nature is amoral, and dangerous, and that whether you think wilderness should be claimed will depend on whether you enjoy living in the wilderness. "I built a city on this mountain top because I like the view. If you enjoyed skiing here, too bad."

Chaos would claim that nature is red in tooth and claw, violent, and that the supreme destructive power of nature shows that what Law considers "the proper order of things" is an aberration. "Your city on the mountain top exists only because you were strong enough to build it. But when an avalanche destroys your little city, you'll see you weren't strong enough to keep it."

The idea of "druids v. wood cutters" is not something that the Auran Empire setting concerns itself with. The idea of progress versus environmentalism is a very modern idea. Of course Modern ACKS (MACKS!) might have an "alignment system" of "techno-capitalists" and "environmentalists" as the two opposed factions...

Elven Rangers and Surprise

<http://autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-players-companion-playtest/elven-rangers-and-surprise>

May 21, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

CelticTony wrote:

Since Elven Rangers get a +2 to surprise rolls in wilderness areas, does this mean they can't normally be surprised in the Wilderness?

That's correct. Unless their opponent imposes a penalty on surprise (such as a tiger or a barbarian do), the elven ranger will not be surprised in normal circumstances whilst operating in the wilderness.

Warlock Hexgiver Ability

<http://autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-players-companion-playtest/warlock-hexgiver-ability>

May 21, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

CelticTony wrote:

Isn't the warlock hexgiver ability that causes the target to have a 50% ability to not act a little over powered? It seems to me that a 50/50 shot to shut down a powerful enemy is very, very good...

The warlock's hexgiver power is just the spell "bestow curse". It's certainly a good spell but it's not overpowered. 1st level charm person can make an enemy into a friend with only one save, hold person can shut down 1d4 targets, etc.

Character Generation

<http://autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/character-generation>

June 20, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Thomas Weigel wrote:

Hi! My first post, and naturally it's about numbers.

I did some random sampling (~500,000 each), and it looks like the Advanced Character generation methods have these average results:

Adventurer: 11.90

Conqueror: 12.51

King: 12.87

These all assume optimal behavior, which of course, not all players will follow. And the averages do not account for -2/+1 optimization, although I suspect that would drop all of them by about -0.5 on average (so 11.40, 12.01, and 12.47 respectively).

I tend to be a soft-hearted GM, not old-school at all, so I would probably go with the King method at 1st level, but that is so tantalizingly similar to the results of 4d6, drop the lowest, that I think I would rather just do the 4d6 method (still in order) and let the player increase one score by +2 (max 18) or two scores by +1 (max 18) to get the averages roughly correct.

Thomas - thanks very much for doing the random sampling. I don't have the ability to run such large random samples readily. Can I hit you up if I need some data analysis on other projects?!

Mr. Grogg then wrote:

The 3d6 in order thing is probably my only hard sticking point with the rules. I understand the idea behind it: It's game about normal people going out and doing great things and becoming powerful through their acts, not about superheroes going out and beating everything up.

Still, though, I think I look at chargen from a different perspective. There are above-average people in the world. Most of them are above average in one way, and below average in another way. When choosing whose role I want to assume, I would tend to pick one of these exceptional people instead of a pig farmer. Why shouldn't I be able to?

A good example comes from a real world article I read today: <http://www.buzzfeed.com/jtes/the-strongest-woman-in-america-lives-in-pov...>

Here's a person who clearly has a strength of 18, and a charisma of probably 7 or 8. From her employment situation, I would guess that her intelligence is 10 at best. (Else she'd hopefully be able to find a way to leverage her abilities to find income.) In other words, a person way above average in some ways, totally average in some ways, and below average in other ways. But an admirable person, and one who a person playing the roleplaying game which is our universe might choose to portray. So they sit down ready to play the role of Sarah Robles. But none of the player's five characters happen to describe such a person. Sorry. You can't play that character.

Huh?

This is why I like more flexible systems. Personally, I've always held to rolling 4d6 two times, dropping the lowest die of each roll, and 3d6 four times, and assign the resulting 6 rolls as desired. Now you will get a slightly more powerful character, but it allows you more control over who it is you end up portraying. In cases where characters need to be generated away from the Judge's presence, point buy systems allow the same customization while allowing the Judge to influence the average power of a character by adjusting the number of points available. Both ways work great.

If you want a truly average person, but still want more control over who you get to play, then use 3d6 only - but assign the six scores in whatever order you desire.

I'd love to hear input from the creators on why this would be detrimental to the game.

Hi Mr. Grogg,

It's not detrimental per se. All of the mechanics you've described are fine. I've personally run ACKS with everything from straight 3d6 to the crazy Unearthed Arcana system of 9d6, 8d6, etc. Chargin is very much a matter of taste.

I will say that I think point-buy is not a good idea for games that aim to have any sense of simulation. Random ability scores result in a world wherein not every character conforms to stereotype, in a way that point buy systems never do.

Let me give an example of what I mean. Assume you are creating a fighter, and you get to assign 18, 16, 14, 13, 10, 10 as your attributes. Here is what 90% of players will create:

S 18, C 16, D 14, I 10, W 13 Ch 10; or S 18, C 14, D 16, I 10, W 13, Ch 10; or S 14, C 16, D 18, I 10, W 13, Ch 10 (for the archer lovers). They might move the 13 to Ch or Int. But that's basically how the stats are going to be allocated.

This trend became painfully obvious in 3.5, when players calculated the mathematically best placement of ability scores using the normal array, elite array, and each level of point buy. Optimizers would routinely chide players for sub-optimal allocation. Etc.

With purely random ability scores, though, you might get a character who looks like this:

S 16, C 14, D 13, I 10, W 10, Ch 18; or

S 13, C 18, D 10, I 16, W 13, Ch 10; or

S 18, C 10, D 10, I 13, W 10, C 16; and so on

It makes the game world richer and more realistic if sometimes you have a fighter who's clumsy but charismatic; or not as strong, but very cunning; or iron-willed and charismatic, but with a weak constitution; and so on. Such persons populate our history books, yet - in the absence of random rolls - they will never populate our game worlds.

I agree with you that our PCs/adventurers should represent the better-than-average human being. ACKS' recommended system is to roll 3d6 in order, generating 5 characters, and then pick the best 1. That gives you a character who is in the top 20% of the human race, but it emerges organically, rather than by fiddling with the dice.

If you want to be more heroic, roll up 10 character, and pick the best 1. For "chosen one" campaigns, roll up 100 characters and pick the best 1. (With an automated character generator, it's pretty easy to do that sort of thing).

Custom Power Level Trade-Offs

<http://autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-players-companion-playtest/custom-power-level-trade-offs>

July 11, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Thomas Weigel wrote:

I have been trying to wrap my head around the Custom Powers Trade-Offs table. The line "The Judge may devise other options along these lines as desired" implied to me that there was a mathematical or logical relationship involved, but I haven't been able to completely suss it out.

Here's what I have sussed. I would love comments, corrections, or alternatives with a smoother progression.

Basic Swap

Swap one power for two powers at a much later level. The later level is as shown below.

level 1 -> 7

level 7 -> 11

level 8 -> 11.5

level 9 -> 12

level 10 -> 12.5

level 11 -> 13

level 12 -> 13.5

The closest approximation I could manage is:

$(13 - \text{level}) \times 0.5 + \text{level} + (\text{level} \times 0.1, \text{rounded}).$

Of course, there's no way to no if that equation is actually correct, but it gives these numbers:

*level 1 -> 7
level 2 -> 7.5
level 3 -> 8
level 4 -> 8.5
level 5 -> 10
level 6 -> 10.5
level 7 -> 11
level 8 -> 11.5
level 9 -> 12
level 10 -> 12.5
level 11 -> 13
level 12 -> 13.5
level 13 -> 14*

Complex Swap

Swap two powers for three powers at a later level, as shown below:

level 1 -> 5

With only one data point, I could map any equation to it I wanted. But it seems reasonable to build off the previous equation and use:

$(13 - \text{level}) \times 0.35 + \text{level} + (\text{level} \times 0.1, \text{rounded to the nearest half})$

That gives these numbers:

level 1 -> 5
level 2 -> 6
level 3 -> 7
level 4 -> 7.5
level 5 -> 8.5
level 6 -> 9
level 7 -> 9.5
level 8 -> 11
level 9 -> 11.5
level 10 -> 12
level 11 -> 12.5
level 12 -> 13.5
level 13 -> 14.5

Lump for Lump

Shift one power up a level and another power down a level, or up and down half a level for the fractional starting points. The power being bumped down a level must be at least one level higher than the original power that was swapped out to get it.

In order to reverse-engineer the system, you need to make a spreadsheet that assigns a value to class powers based on what level they unlock.

1. Start with the assumption that a character spends 1 / 14th of his adventuring career at each of 14 levels.
2. Set the value of a power available at level 1 as 1 point.
3. Calculate the relative value of any power as equal to the value of a power at level 1 x the amount of time the power is available to the character over the course of his career.

EXAMPLE: A power available at level 8 is worth $(14-7/14) \times 1 = 0.5$, because it's available for half the character's adventuring career.

EXAMPLE: A power available at level 14 is worth $(14-13/14) \times 1 = 0.071$, because it's available for 1 / 14th the character's adventuring career.

At this point you'll be close to the answer, but not quite. In practice, a character doesn't *actually* spend $1/14$ th of his career at every level; because of fatalities, retirement, and the nature of campaigns, the actual value of powers needs to be reduced after level 1.

Therefore, assume that you can trade off 1 point of value at level 1 for 1.142 points of powers at later levels.

This will let you calculate the value of the various trade offs. to within 0.1.

EXAMPLE: The value of a power at level 4 is $(11/14)$ 0.785. The value of a power at level 10 is $(5/14)$ 0.357. The sum is 1.142. Therefore, a trade-off of 1 power at level 1 for powers at level 4 and 10 costs 1 power.

EXAMPLE: The value of a power at level 7 is $(8/14)$ 0.571. Two powers at level 7 are worth $(0.571+0.571)$ 1.142. Therefore, a trade-off of 1 power at level 1 for 2 powers at level 7 costs 1 power.

Etc.

Build Points for ACKS Classes?

<http://autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-players-companion-playtest/build-points-acks-classes>

July 14, 2012

Tag: Q&A

drnuncheon wrote:

Just preordered the Player's Companion and am delighted to see that the Shaman has a Druid template already created. Saves me some trouble!

Have the build points for the standard ACKS classes been put up anywhere? I notice that some of them show up in the examples, but the Spellsword has two different builds:

In the Saving Throws and Magic Items section:

EXAMPLE: The standard elven spellsword was built with Hit Dice Value 1, Fighting Value 2, Elf Value 4.

In the Strongholds section:

EXAMPLE: The standard elven spellsword was built with Hit Dice Value 1, Fighting Value 2, Arcane Value 1, Elf Value 3.

And in the Elven Custom Classes section:

EXAMPLE: The standard elven spellsword is built with Hit Dice 1, Fighting Value 2, Arcane Value 1, Elf Value 3. The XP cost for level 2 is $500 + 1,000 + (625 - 125) + 2000$, for a total of 4,000XP.

It looks like they come out to the same amount XP-wise, but for clarity's sake you probably want to pick one or the other for the examples.

Good catch on the elven spellsword.

Fighter: HD 2, Fighting 2

Thief: HD 0, Fighting 1, Thievery 3

Cleric: HD 1, Fighting 1, Divine 2

Mage: Arcane 4

Assassin: HD 1, Fighting 2, Thievery 1

Bladedancer: HD 1, Fighting 1 (2 trade offs), Divine 2

Explorer: HD 1, Fighting 2 (2 trade offs), Thievery 1 [I think - working from memory here]

Most of the core class builds were very simple. The PC class builds are way more complex and esoteric. want to pick one or the other for the examples.

Barbarian: HD 2, Fighting 2, 4 tradeoffs

Dwarven Delver: HD 1, Fighting 1, Thievery 2, Dwarf 2

Dwarven Machinist: HD 1, Fighting 1, Thievery 2, Dwarf 3, 1 tradeoff

Elven Enchanter: HD 0, Fighting 0, Thievery 1, Arcane 2, Elf 2

Elven Ranger: HD 1, Fighting 2, Thievery 1, 3 tradeoffs

Mystic: HD 1, Fighting 2, Thievery 1, 5 tradeoffs

Paladin: HD 1, Fighting 2, Thievery 1, 1 tradeoff

Priestess: HD 0, Divine 4

Shaman: HD 1, Fighting 1, Divine 2, 4 tradeoffs

Warlock: HD 0, Thievery 1, Arcane 3, 1 tradeoff

CharlesDM added others, which Alex did not correct, so they're likely correct:

The Bard seems to be HD 1, Fighting 1, Thievery 2, but has the Fighting Value 2+ Stronghold and related power as a Judge's call?

The other rulebook classes appear to be:

Dwarven Vaultguard: HD 2, Fighting 2, Dwarf 0

Dwarven Craftpriest: HD 1, Fighting 1, Divine 2, Dwarf 3

Elven Spellword: HD 1, Fighting 2, Elf 4

Elven Nightblade: HD 1, Fighting 1, Thievery 2, Elf 2

Dwarven Fury: HD 2, Fighting 2 (6 tradeoffs), Dwarf 0

Elven Courtier: HD 1, Fighting 1 (1 tradeoff), Thievery 1, Arcane 1, (High) Elf 1

Gnomish Trickster: HD 0, Fighting 1 (2 tradeoffs), Gnome 4

Thrassian Gladiator: HD 2, Fighting 2, Thrassian 2

Witch: HD 0, Divine 4, 4 tradeoffs

Ambush & Backstab Question

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/ambush-backstab-question>

June 11, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Rodriguez wrote:

How often should a player be able to backstab or ambush an enemy in a fight?

Elven Rangers for example can vanish in the underbrush on a 4+, so does that mean that my monster has to succeed on a listen check to prevent getting double damage on the next attack or is it impossible to hide once combat started?

I generally allow a backstab again if the thief is able to break line of sight (often through invisibility or an elven cloak), move silently up to the target, and the target is distracted. But it's definitely a judgment call.

You don't want to make it so difficult to get a backstab that the thief's core power is useless, but you also don't want it to be so simple as 3.5's "flanking the target". The thief isn't meant to be a "striker" in the 3.5 sense.

Jard then wrote:

would you consider being engaged in combat a sufficient distraction? IE: the rest of the party has formed up into ranks and is fighting while the thief/assassin sneaks around the back to stab a mage?

as someone who has played probably 95% 3.5 and later... this non-tactical stuff is going to take some time for me to get used to :-)

It would quite depend. If the room was dark, or there were obstacles blocking line of sight, and the fight was loud and noisy, then I'd permit it. On the other hand, in a brightly lit room, with the fighting confined to a low hum, I'd probably not.

If you like tactical combat, you can play ACKS in a more tactical manner -- lay out miniatures with 5' block, use the engagement rules as a zone-of-control, and so on. It works quite well. One of our local GMs prefers to play that way.

If that's the route you go, then I think you could rule that Hide/Move is possible so long as the NPC target doesn't get an unobstructed line of sight to the sneaking character.

Jard then wrote:

One more question: cleaving. Could an assassin hypothetically sneak up on some low-level ish guards and backstab all of them (provided enough damage was dealt) using the cleaving rules?

Yes. If none of the guards were aware of the assassin when he began attacking, or all of the guards were surprised, then any cleaves would also constitute backstabs.

Cleric Spell Progression and Divine Value Multipliers

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-players-companion-playtest/cleric-spell-progression-and-divine>

July 21, 2012

Tag: Q&A

koewn wrote:

Quick question, and I apologize if it's been answered, I've not found it on the forums or in the ACKS:PC.

Cleric (Divine 2, 1x spell progression) gains no spells at Level 1.

The Priestess, (Divine 4, 1.5x spell progression) gains 1 spell.

There's no Divine 3 example given that I've seen (may be blind), so, is 1.33×0 less than or equal to 1? :)

Thanks!

Hi Koewn - A caster with a Divine Value 3 gets no spells at 1st level, because $1.33 \times 0 = 0$.

A caster with Divine Value of 4 would also get no spells at 1st level, except for a rule in the text. I've bolded the relevant text below:

Divine 4: A Divine Value of 4 gives the class the ability to turn undead and cast spells as a cleric, with additional bonus spells per level. Increase the class's spells per level by 50% to determine the class's spell progression. Round fractions of .5 or greater up. The class uses its class level for all level-dependent spell ranges, durations, and damages; these are not increased by 50%. **In addition, a class with Divine 4 can cast one 1st level divine spell per day at 1st level.** The class's divine spell repertoire is based on a spell list of 15 spells per level.

Mage Apprentices and Sanctums

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/mage-apprentices-and-sanctums>

July 26, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Thomas Weigel wrote:

A sanctum attracts 1d6 apprentices of level 1-3.

Zero-level apprentices have a chance of becoming level 1 a few times a year.

The maximum number of leveled apprentices is 6, so assuming a mage ends up with six level-1 apprentices at some point ...

How do those apprentices gain XP to get higher levels?

One of them (or 2, 3, or 4 if the mage has a CHA bonus) can act as an assistant in magical research, and gain XP from that. The other five ... should the wizard send them out on adventures? Give them gold in the GP=XP sense? Are there other ways to earn XP?

The apprentices have two way to gain XP. The first is to work as assistants and do magical research. The second is to go on adventures.

Since the average mage will usually only be able to handle 1-2 assistants (rarely 3-4), he usually has a surplus that he will dispatch on adventures. That this leads to young mages getting sent out into the world by their masters is not coincidental.

A kind wizard will probably use each of his apprentices as an assistant in turn, ensuring that each gets some XP from research. Many wizards are not, however, very kind. These wizards are likely to keep the *best* apprentice (highest INT, with Magical Engineering proficiency) as their assistant continuously.

Note that simply being paid a wage or given gold does not give the apprentice any XP. An apprentice who took it upon himself to become an arbitrage trader might gain XP, though, but someone interested in being a merchant isn't likely to be a mage apprentice.

Jard then wrote:

Alex, can you offer some insight into at what levels and in what ways mages can take on apprentices? on page 147 there is an example where Quintus, a 5th level mage, gives his apprentice a sample that allows him to make a scroll of sleep. This seems to be somewhat corroborated by the beginning of magic research "Up until 4th level, spellcasters cannot engage in magic research except by serving as assistants for more powerful casters (as described later)." Meanwhile, the section about assistants on page 119 says "An assistant is a mage or other arcane spellcaster of at least 1st level that is under the employ of a 9th level or higher arcane caster"

Is there some distinction that I've missed? what are the level requirements for receiving and providing assistance?

The sentence on page 119 is incorrect in that it's overly specific to 9th level. A more correct reading would be: "An assistant is a mage or other arcane spellcaster of at least 1st level that is under the employ of an arcane caster capable of magical research."

Spell Power Guidelines Gap

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-players-companion-playtest/spell-power-guidelines-gap>

August 02, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

Traigan wrote:

I realize this it is probably too late at this point for feedback, but I noticed that the spell power guidelines do not appear to have costs for such things as adding a temporary bonus to a weapon or for temporarily enhancing a target's attack throws.

Perhaps it might still be possible to squeeze in some general guidance on how to set base costs and multipliers for effects that are not covered by the tables?

Hi Traigan, you are correct - there's no "buff" spell mechanic. That was by design, as I tend to think the overwhelming number of buff spells that appear in other D&D variants is part of why those games have such severe balance problems.

If you want to create "buff" spells, you can add some Effect Modifiers to the Transmogrification types, perhaps, or the Protection spell types.

2-Handed Weapon vs. 2-Handed Wield

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/2-handed-weapon-vs-2-handed-wield>

August 06, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

The plain-speech nature of some of the character rules can be confusing.

For instance, some classes say that they can use 2-handed weapons, while other say that they can use a weapon in two hands, and others don't say either, or say the opposite, which means that they cannot do... something, but it's not clear what.

Can dwarves not use 2-handed weapons (while still being able to use a weapon in two hands)? Is that how that's intended?

My thief can use a sword 1 handed (1d6), but can he use it with two hands (1d8)?

Thanks.

The rules distinguish between "what you're trained to fight with" and "how you're trained to fight with it".

What Weapons You Fight With (Weapon Training)

What you're trained to fight with are specific weapons or weapon groups. For example, "any missile weapons and any one-handed melee weapons" (thief) or "daggers, swords, spears, and polearms" (bladedancer).

For these purposes, a weapon's "handedness" is defined by the minimum number of hands required to use it. A short sword and sword are therefore both one-handed weapons. A two-handed sword is a two-handed weapon. All two-handed weapons are noted as such in parentheses in the Weapons and Equipment table of the rules.

How You Fight With Your Weapons (Fighting Style)

The rules restrict access to three important fighting styles: Weapon and Shield; Weapon With Two Hands; Weapon in Each Hand. Essentially, it's a question of what you do with your off-hand. Do you wield a shield? Do you wield a second weapon? Or do you add it to the grip on your main weapon for added strength?

Some weapons are incompatible with particular styles.

- Tiny melee weapons (daggers) and small melee weapons (hand axes, short swords) cannot be used in "Weapon With Two Hands" style.
- Large melee weapons (e.g. polearms, two-handed swords) cannot be used in "Weapon and Shield" and "Weapon in Each Hand" style.
- Medium melee weapons (e.g. sword, battle axe, mace, flail, spear) can be used in any fighting style

The Interplay of Weapon and Fighting Style

The ability to use a particular weapon does not convey the ability to fight in a particular style. For example, if you can use a battle axe, but can't fight in "weapon with two hands" style, then you cannot wield a battle axe with two hands.

The *inability* to use a particular weapon does not remove the ability to fighting a particular style. For example, consider the case of an explorer, who can fight with a weapon in two hands, but cannot use Two-Handed Weapons. What this means is that an explorer can wield a spear with two hands, or a battle axe with two hands, but cannot wield a two-handed sword or polearm.

Rules As Intended

In re-reading the core rulebook, I note a few areas where the rules-as-written diverged from the rules-as-intended (or at least I am not as explicit about an implicit intent). Specifically:

1. Thieves are allowed to fight with two hands on a weapon. (If you build a thief using custom class rules, you'll note that the thief does not make any fighting style trade-off, so he's eligible for two fighting styles.)
2. Dwarven Vaultguards are permitted to fight with dwarf-sized two-handed weapons such as dwarven great axes and morning stars. These would be weapons with a shorter haft but retaining a heavy striking head requiring two hands to use. The clumsy language "human sized two-handed weapons" was very awkward. The intent is to restrict dwarves from using ill-sized weapons, not to reduce their striking power per se. No Dwarven class is permitted to fight with human-sized two-handed weapons.

Elven Blooded Query

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/elven-blooded-query>

August 07, 2012

Tag: Q&A

gallowglacht wrote:

On my first skim through I missed the fact that Elven Blooded isn't a general proficiency and so figured that an Explorer with alertness and elven blood would make a good wood elf Legolas type, simply assuming that the proportion of his blood that was elven = 100%.

Looking over it, explorers don't seem to have access to elven blooded unlike mages and bards. It seemed like a natural fit to me so now my curiosity is piqued, how come it isn't on the explorers list?

[BTW I am really impressed with what I've seen so far.]

Each class has a limited pool of proficiencies. The exact formula is listed in the Player's Companion. In any event, I simply selected proficiencies I thought were balanced and diverse across all the character classes.

Nothing particularly "breaks" if you let an Explorer take Elven Bloodline, but you should probably take away one of their other quite useful proficiencies in exchange.

As Ludanto said, there's an Elven Ranger in Player's Companion that might be a good fit, too.

Class Balancing...

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/class-balancing>

August 26, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Maxwell Luther wrote:

I was thinking about making some new custom classes for my campaign to replace the basic ones and the idea behind them is to make more 'Vancian' characters who are more well rounded than the typical mage/fighter/cleric/thief.

So instead of 4 point niche classes I'd create a set of 6 point classes that are all Fighter 2, Thief 1 in basic ability and then add 3 more points in magic, divine, thieving, Hit Dice or general customization, based upon the class specifics. Basically I'm creating a set of more general adventurer types with specialties ala Conan, Fafhrd, Elric, etc.

But the question is this: are the classes balanced so long as they all are built on 6 or is 4 also balanced against the game world as well (especially when taking into account elves, dwarves, etc.)? Considering the increased XP cost to level and the still fragile nature of characters due to beginning HP totals, Save or Die effects, etc. I'm fairly certain the same old school play-style will continue to manifest itself, but I wanted to see the reasoning behind the Player's Companion system before I implemented them...

There is some balancing inherent in the four-point build total. There are 4 class categories: Fighter, Cleric, Mage, Thief. There are 4 points. The Mage, being the most specialized class, has the highest points in his class category. The Priestess is a similar build, but for Clerics. And so on.

When you create classes with more than 4 points each, you are creating classes that can specialize in two categories. For example, the elven spellsworn can fight as well as the fighter, and cast spells as well as the mage. This is why ACKS has fairly punitive level restrictions, to prevent generalists from advancing as high as specialists.

That said, if you were playing a single player campaign (1 Judge, 1 Player) I could see an argument for assigning 8 build points to the PC without impacting the level cap. That would give you a hero with d8 hit points who could fight like a fighter and cast spells as a mage - Elric, in other words. If you were playing a two-player campaign (1 Judge, 2 Players), I could see giving 6 build points per PC. That would let you build Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser.

If you have more than 2 players, I'd stick to 4 build points with level caps for excess build points, in order to ensure niche protection.

Maxwell Luthor then wrote:

Alex, not to appear dim, but I'm not sure I fully understand your reply. Are you saying that classes are, indeed, balanced against more than each other, then? The way you put it, all that seems to matter is the level cap, which in this case would be 11, but if all characters in those classes have that level cap (except Demi-Humans) then why is the cap necessary? Is it for balance against the standard monsters and NPCs, and/or important when it comes to the internal sub-systems?

If not, then I'm thinking that Twyll's demi-human cap increase would work to redress the balance. After all, if all classes share the common point bonus of Fighter 2, Thief 1 and can use their remaining points to specialize, then the niches are still technically protected, aren't they? Even the fighter, who can spend their extra points on bigger HD or by claiming a Hero Tier in fighting ability.

I'm not adverse to level capping the PCs at 11, as that is relatively light given the 14 level max, but I wonder if it is necessary given the general increase for all classes across the board.

Hi Maxwell,

I apologize that I was unclear. You asked "Are you saying that classes are, indeed, balanced against more than each other, then?"

What I was trying to say is that the classes are balanced with the idea that there will be 4 or more players in the group, with each player intended to fill one niche in the game (fighter, thief, mage, cleric). Classes with more than 4 points are generalists who overlap two niches at a cost of depth.

So I was simply cautioning that, while the idea of Vancian characters is fun and attractive, IF your group is large (4+ players) it may actually decrease the fun of the game by eliminating niche protection and reducing the benefits of team work. IF your group is small (1-3 players), it will be great fun.

Regardless of the size of the group, you should set level 14 as the maximum level for whatever you decide is the "base build points" in your setting. If all of your players get 6 build points for their classes, then set level 14 as the maximum level for 6 build points.

Hell, if you wanted to try something really out-there, you could go with the following:

0 Build Points: Max Level 1 - 50% of population gets 0 build points

1 Build Point: Max Level 2 - 25% of population gets 1 build point

2 Build Points: Max Level 4 - 10% of population gets 2 build points

3 Build Points: Max Level 6 - 5% of population gets 3 build points

4 Build Points: Max Level 8 - 2% of population gets 4 build points

5 Build Points: Max Level 11 - 0.5% of population gets 5 build points

6 Build Points: Max Level 14 - 0.01% of population gets 6 build points

Bracers of Armor and the Dwarven Fury

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/bracers-armor-and-dwarven-fury>

October 22, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

Talmonis wrote:

Would the magic item "Bracers of armor" stack with the AC bonus from "Flesh Runes"? I have a player who is seriously pursuing the item with the expectation that it does. The rules as written are vague enough to not give a clear yes/no on it, or are the "Flesh Runes" treated as armor in and of themselves?

Yes, Bracers of Armor do stack with the AC bonus from Flesh Runes.

Tweaking the Witch's Grey Lore for a Paladin

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/tweaking-witchs-grey-lore-paladin>

January 31, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Altered Priest wrote:

I'm new to the forums, and to ACKS in general. I've had the pdf for some time, but it sat unread on my hard drive until I got the Companion.

I like the Paladin as presented in the Companion; however, I'm really missing the ability to turn undead. I don't want to totally reinvent the wheel and create a new paladin from the ground up--especially since the rules specify that turning undead is not a custom power (and I get why for balance reasons), so I can't just add it anyway.

I was thinking about swapping a custom power for a tweaked version of the Voudoun Witch's Grey Lore custom power. Here's my take on it for a Paladin (the title is a reference to Stephen King's Dark Tower series):

White Lore:

The paladin has studied ancient tomes and prayed in crumbling monasteries; his knowledge and faith allow him to turn undead as a cleric of 1/2 his level. Additionally, the paladin's conviction in the face of these terrors affords the paladin's Aura of Sanctity protection to any companions within 10'.

I've replaced the Witch's bonus on using fear spells with the Paladin's ability to share his Aura of Sanctity bonus.

I'm not sure which of the core Paladin's powers I'm going to replace; probably sanctified body or lay on hands.

I'm looking for some input. Do you think this makes the core paladin too powerful? Is the power itself unbalanced? In particular, is sharing the Aura of Sanctity bonus too powerful? What else, if anything, would you consider using in place of the Witch's bonus on fear spells. Any input would be appreciated!

I think your overall approach is solid. I'd probably replace Divine Blessing (+2 on saves). Since it's a static bonus rather than an active power, it doesn't detract from the "feel" of playing the paladin (why can't I lay on hands??) and it's easy to add back in with a proficiency if the player really wants it. You could also just make White Lore available as a class proficiency if you want to let paladins choose to be able to turn.

Potential Thief Houserule

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/potential-thief-houserule>

March 03, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Adam Meyers wrote:

Note: I haven't actually played the game yet. I've got people interested and I'm writing the campaign, but I noticed something and wanted some input on it.

I'm curious about the target numbers for thief skills. You have to be something like a 7th level thief before you can even succeed half the time on your average skill check. Now obviously only a master thief (14th level) could be expected to be amazing at absolutely everything, but most thieves in real life specialize: one is a lock smith, the other sneaks in, etc. The +2 bonus from taking a proficiency hardly seems adequate to reflect that.

I'm thinking of allowing players to assign their skill increases as they level. When the thief levels up, he could increase his 8 skills each by 1, or 1 skill by 8, or 2 skills by 4, etc. That way if he wants to be a specialist, he doesn't have to wait until he's in the moderate levels before he has a 50% chance of succeeding whenever he attempts his favorite skill.

Is this a good idea? Or would this be a horrible idea? How would this effect the rest of the game? (with such a well-crafted interplay of systems, I know this would drastically affect things like hiring experts for hijinks, etc.)

If it isn't a good idea, how do other game tables get around the fact that a thief, at least to my reading, seems rather useless until the moderate-high levels?

Witness then wrote:

Note: I also have not started my campaign yet, so take everything here with a grain of salt.

The thing I would be careful about is assuming that the thief needs to succeed on these reliably.

A thief who fails to open the lock with his skill may still be able to destroy the thing with an axe or crowbar (the penalty for failure is not "you can't pass" but "you make noise")

A thief who fails to move silently or hide in shadows still has the normal chance to surprise opponents. There's no real penalty for failing at these.

Picking pockets is risky, but I feel like it should be most of the time. Have an escape plan handy because you will be noticed.

A thief's climb walls and hear noise skills are good (at least compared to other characters).

If a thief fails to find or remove a trap, it still only goes off 2 in 6 by default.

I feel like the existing rules suggest certain styles of play for the thief - one will make huge, complex contingency plans for what to do when their skill rolls go awry; another will be constantly improvising, escaping from one fire into another. Both require a player who knows and accepts that the skills aren't the end, but one of many means to achieve an end.

As for your house rules, the issue I see is that a character could become very good at certain kinds of hijinks, able to make a great deal of cash (and XP) significantly faster than the game expects. If you go through with this, you would probably want to make some corresponding modifications to that system.

Witness is right that if you adjust the target values of thief skills, you'll radically change the results of Hijinks. Low level thieves will be able to reliably perform high-level hijinks and score a lot of gold.

For what it's worth, I run the thief class "straight" in all of my ACKS campaigns. We have never had a shortage of players who want to play thieves. In the original Auran Empire campaign, we had a thief; in our Oriental ACKS, a ninja; and now in Opelenean Nights, a thief.

If you think low-level thieves need a boost, you might consider the following:

1. Crude locks are +4 to unlock. Master-crafted locks are -4 to unlock.
2. Crude traps are +4 to find and disarm. Master-crafted traps are -4.
3. Heavily shadowed areas give +4 to hide in shadows.
4. Loud, noisy environments give +4 to move silently.

Mixed Followers

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/mixed-followers>

March 08, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Nerdnumber1 wrote:

I was wondering if there were any existing rules allowing for a character to attract a group of followers (be it for a thieves guild, mage tower, or the like) of classes related to, but not exactly the same as their own class. I have a couple of friends with demihuman characters living deep in human lands, far removed from their own kind. I figured it would be more likely for an exotic and powerful demihuman attracting local human followers than a group of low-level elves or dwarves traveling hundreds of miles through monster-infested lands out of the blue. So, could a high level Elven Nightblade be able to attract human thieves or assassins, resulting in the equivalent of a thief or assassin's hideout?

I could see this being a house rule if not explicitly mentioned, I just wanted to see if it had come up in the past.

It's not explicitly handled in the rules, but I think what you are suggesting for your campaign is very reasonable and probably the right thing to do!

The only one I'd be cautious about is allowing someone to get clerical followers, as those are the best followers to get in terms of numbers and morale. I think you can freely and reasonably trade between mage, thief, and fighter followers without real issue. Doing so creates an interestingly different "feel" for the class. For example, if an explorer gets a hideout and thief followers, he feels like Robin Hood. A mage who gets fighter followers might feel like a sorcerer-king.

Does Anyone NOT Give Max Hit Points at First Level?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/does-anyone-not-give-max-hit-points-first-level>

April 10, 2013

Tag: Q&A

DrSkull wrote:

I'm about to make the switch over to ACKS from AD&D1 or Rules Cyclopaedia versions of D&D for my old school needs. I've been thinking about what to do about hit points.

For the longest time, I've used Max HP at first level. But, I've used a bunch of other schemes too, including a Castles and Crusades campaign years ago when I had the PC's roll hit points (and had a big stack of replacements at hand).

So, I'm probably going for maximum at first, but was wondering whether anyone just lets the dice do the talking at first. If so, how does it work out. I'm most inclined to use maximum at first, because it seems the most "Fair" to fighters and other d8 classes that they should get some benefit from the die type up front guaranteed. And face it, having 1 or 2 hit points is just blowful no matter who you are.

What I would recommend as the "ideal" system is max hit points at 1st level with hit points cumulatively re-rolled at every level (never going less than 1 point + CON mod of the hp of the prior level).

Some level of randomness in hit points can be desirable because it can help balance out a character who didn't roll well at the game's start. We have one character who has been kept from being a "combat god" (STR 18, DEX 16) by a few bad hit point rolls, and another character who might not have amounted to much except for his first three levels yielding really good hit point rolls, resulting in him being the party tank.

Thief 'Read Languages' and Low Int

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/thief-read-languages-and-low-int>

April 10, 2013

Tag: Q&A

James S wrote:

One of my players has a Thief with Int 7, which means they can barely read or write. At 4th level they get the 'Read Languages' ability which functions as per the spell, only on a 5+ on d20.

This presents a minor paradox. Any thoughts?

My own thinking is that they get the ability, but the chance of success is far smaller (17+). If they spend a Language proficiency slot on being literate then the skill will function as per the usual rules.

Am I being too harsh? or is it just a cruel outcome of ending up with a low Int?

I would simply force them to use Read Languages even when reading their own language. In other words they've become semi-literate from years of learning on the streets and picking up bits and pieces of jargon and text here and there, but they're still semi-literate even in their own tongue.

Unarmed & Dex-Penalty

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/unarmed-dex-penalty>

April 12, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Beastman wrote:

hiho,

An unarmored character has AC 0. now what happens if the character also has a DEX-Penalty - say -2. is his unarmored AC -2 or is AC 0 the lowest AC possible?

You'd have AC -2 or whatnot. AC 0 is not the worst possible AC, merely the AC of an average unarmored man.

Minor Wizard Item

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/minor-wizard-item>

May 12, 2013

Tag: Q&A

DrSkull wrote:

In my previous AD&D 1e campaign, I gave any wizard who joined a magical order a very minor magic item as part of the membership. This item varied from order to order, but was usually something like this:

A wand that fires a beam of fire at one target, the caster must make a regular "to hit" roll with the wand, and it does 1d4 points of damage. The wand has 100 charges and cannot be recharged. It has a range of 30 feet.

The effects could vary a bit depending on the order (slightly longer range, but less damage and ice instead of fire; or area of effect, but only 1 point of damage, etc.)

My reasoning was, that mages ought to be fighting with magic rather than throwing darts. The wands allow them to magic-it-up, even if the game effect was similar to chucking a dart or dagger.

As I convert my setting for ACKS, I'm wondering whether to include these minor wands for mages who decide to join a magical order (which would entail taking the Collegiate Wizardry proficiency). In practice they were not game-changers in AD&D. But, on the other hand I don't have vivid memories of them getting scads of use either. My own illusionist (when a player took a turn behinds the screen) got more use out of flaming oil than his stun wand, I seem to recall.

It's a relatively minor item and I doubt it would be particularly unbalancing. The only area where I can see it impacting gameplay might be when the party encounters creatures that can only be harmed by magic weapons or spells. A 1st level mage tosses a dagger cannot harm a wraith, but a 1st level mage with a wand such as you've described can.

Arcane and Divine Value-Granted Spells

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/arcane-and-divine-value>

May 15, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Kamard wrote:

Curious if it would be overly game breaking to allow Divine Value-granted spells to be delayed in a similar manner as Arcane Value spells.

I am also interested in balance related to spell delay of, for example, Arcane Value 2 (Delay CL-5 to get full casting). Would it be at all balanced to allow a delay of CL-3 to get 2/3 casting?

Curious if it would be overly game breaking to allow Divine Value-granted spells to be delayed in a similar manner as Arcane Value spells.

APM: You can do that, but keep in mind that only Divine 1 offers a fractional level of divine casting.

I am also interested in balance related to spell delay of, for example, Arcane Value 2 (Delay CL-5 to get full casting). Would it be at all balanced to allow a delay of CL-3 to get 2/3 casting?

APM: Here are the correlations between fractional level and delayed availability of spell progressions:

(Fractional Level) (Delayed Availability)

Class level Class level

$\frac{2}{3}$ class level Class level – 3

$\frac{1}{2}$ class level Class level – 5

$\frac{1}{3}$ class level Class level – 7

So, yes, you can trade Caster Level -3 to allow 2/3 casting, or vice versa.

Spellcasting, Shields, and Weapons

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/spellcasting-shields-and-weapons>

May 23, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Slippery_Chicken wrote:

Several questions here. I could find answers for casting in armor, but not while using shields or held objects like weapons. The rules say the spellcaster must be able to move his hands, but this is ambiguous to me.

1. Can a magic-user cast spells while he has a shield equipped?

1a. If yes, does the magic-user still benefit from the shield's AC bonus that round?

*1b. If yes, can he cast with a shield equipped *and* a weapon held?*

2. Can a magic-user cast spells while holding just a weapon or other object in one hand, leaving the other unoccupied?

2a. If yes, can he cast with both hands holding such objects/weapons?

3. Do the answers to any of the above questions change when a character who can normally cast in armor (divine spellcaster, Elven Spellsword, etc.) attempts to do so? If so, how?

An arcane caster can "equip" a shield but unless he knows how to fight with a shield, he will gain no AC benefit from doing so.

An arcane caster must have at least one hand free in order to cast spells. Therefore...

1. Can a magic-user cast spells while he has a shield equipped?

APM: Yes, provided he has a hand free.

1a. If yes, does the magic-user still benefit from the shield's AC bonus that round?

APM: Yes, provided he knows how to use shields in the first place.

1b. If yes, can he cast with a shield equipped *and* a weapon held?

APM: No.

2. Can a magic-user cast spells while holding just a weapon or other object in one hand, leaving the other unoccupied?

APM: Yes.

2a. If yes, can he cast with both hands holding such objects/ weapons?

APM: No.

3. Do the answers to any of the above questions change when a character who can normally cast in armor (divine spellcaster, Elven Spellsword, etc.) attempts to do so? If so, how?

APM: Ability to wear armor and ability to use a shield are distinct.

Jard then wrote:

So just to be clear, an elven spellsword must stow either their weapon or their shield to cast a spell?

That's technically correct. However, for a caster wielding two one-handed weapons, I rule the caster can hold both weapons in one hand for one round without having to lose an action sheathing his weapon(s) or having to drop them. For a caster with weapon and shield, I would let him hold his weapon in his shield hand for one round (no AC benefit from shield while doing this).

It's up to you how strict you want to be with this.

Barbarians and Their Strongholds (and Nomadic Barbarians)

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/barbarians-and-their-strongholds-and-nomadic-barbarians>

August 01, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Ahskar wrote:

Hi,

The explained rules for barbarians in the "Player's Companions" says:

At 9th level (Warchief), a barbarian can build or claim a chieftain's hall and seek to rule on the strength of his axe. (...) Barbarians' halls are otherwise identical to fighters' castles, as detailed in the Campaign chapter of the ACKS Rulebook.

Well, This is uncomfortable to me for few (but powerful) reasons:

**They are Barbarian, so they should say: "Hey, what's the engineering? it looks like civilized sh*t". I mean, they are not civilized, so they should not be able to build a civilized Castle. Well, in some circumstances (open-minded barbarians) they would contract a civilized engineer for their builds... but then the barbarians are becoming civilized!*

**The barbarians can be a nomad people: "Barbarians from Skysostan (or related steppe nomads) are preternaturally precise shots. Barbarians from the Ivory Kingdoms (or other regions similar to Central Africa) are swift and tireless runners)*

In this case, the idea of "build" a permanent settlement is really strange to them, and I cannot imagine them thinking about build a Stone Castle.

** I think the income from the domain calculated in ACKS rulebook doesn't fit with the barbaric people. They don't know the civilized agrarian technology. I think for settled barbarians the rules can be used taking into account they have a very low population density. But if you are using nomadic barbarians...*

I have some ideas about how to "fix" these situations, but I really want to know the ideas and opinions from veteran players and the "Autarchs" themselves about it.

So, my home made rules would be:

** They live in small close-knit communities, and they are suspicious people with the foreigners. So, spies and thieves operating against the domain suffer a -2 penalty to their proficiency throws.*

** For settled barbarians, the cost of stone structures and their construction time required are doubled (they have a poor construction technology, and they lack a developed stone industry: quarries, poor roads to transport the stone, etc.), but they don't need an engineer for this task. In consequence their stone fortress would be smaller than civilized ones, and they would prefer to build wood castles. In the other hand, the most of their people are fierce warriors (even their women!), they know how to protect themselves in the wild and they use natural defenses for their settlements. So:*

1- their domains are considered "borderlands" ever, even when they are claiming a new "wild" domain. And they never can have a civilized domain (so, their maximum population is 250 fam. per 6 miles-hex).

2- The minimum stronghold value to maintain a domain is divided by 2 (11,250 gp per 6-mile hex). Their limited resources causes they increase in population as if they were one category larger (table in p. 129).

3- The Garrison cost is the half (1.5 gp per family per month)

In addition, due their lack of urban improvements (sewers, aqueducts, etc.) their urban settlements are limited to 2,499 families or less (market type IV). However, the barbaric people needs a lot of weapons because their form of life, so, you can consider any market as two types bigger for weapons and armors availability (but maybe the Judge would limit the availability of "civilized" weapons and armors, like crossbow, arbalest, siege weapons, banded plate or plate armor).

Finally, the barbaric people works the land in very poor ways (They don't have the technology to build mills, effective irrigation system, etc.). So, their domain income is divided by 2 (like in chaotic domains with beastmen population).

** For nomadic barbarians the cost of wood structures and their construction time required are doubled. The cost of stone structures and their construction time required are multiplied by 10. In either cases they don't need an engineer. In consequence, their strongholds will be small, made in wood, strongholds (permanent markets, temples, forts to protect strategic sources, like oasis or dwells, vigilance towers in hills, etc.). Only the most powerful warlords would able to build stone structures. In the other hand, the most of their people know how to protect themselves, and how to travel by the safest ways. So:*

1- Due they doesn't settled in the same place for a while, their domains are considered "wilderness" ever. In addition, their hunting and recollection techniques doesn't provide enough food for large populations, So, their maximum population is 125 fam. per 6 miles-hex.

2- The minimum stronghold value to maintain a domain is divided by 10 (3,000 gp per 6-mile hex: they doesn't occupy the land, so they don't need a large strongholds). Their limited resources causes they increase in population as if they were two categories larger (table in p. 129).

3- The garrison cost is the quarter (1 gp per family per month), and the most of the "garrison" will travel with their leader.

They don't have "Urban Settlements" beyond 249 fam. and their are very rare (Again: maybe a strategic resource, "permanent" temple or market can attract a few families, but they don't like (and don't know how) live in larger settlements. However, their biggest nomad groups are like "urban settlements". So, instead build a "urban settlements", they can "build" nomad towns: the rules are the same than "urban settlements" but they cannot grow beyond 1000 families (market IV). For porpoises of weapons and armors, consider this market 2 levels bigger (a Market IV will be Market level II). The Judge would limit the availability of "civilized" weapons and armors, and those that require a lot of metal, like crossbow, arbalest, great axes, two-handed swords, siege weapons, ring mail armor or better, etc. For porpoises of livestock, horses and related items, the market counts as 3 levels bigger (only if you are thinking in like-mongol barbarians, of course, nor sub-Saharan people)

In addition, a Nomadic town cannot be in the same region for a while because they hunt and recollect everything, exhausting the land very fast: The maximum time they can stay in the same 6 miles-hew is one month if they have 250 fam. or less, 2 weeks if the have 500 fam. or less, or 1 week if they are 1000 fam. or less. They cannot stay in the same 6 miles-hex until the next season (3 months later). Travel fast through this regions doesn't count as "stay".

Finally, the nomad barbaric people doesn't work the land, and their recollection and hunt is a very poor production way. So, their domain income is divided by 4.

Well, what do you think? Do you see a easier way to manage barbaric people?

Ahskar, those are very detailed mechanics, and I think they would have your desired effects. Certainly playtest them and let us know how they play out.

From my point-of-view, I see barbarian nations as simply the opposite of city-states, that is, they are agrarian or pastoral realms with dispersed settlement patterns. That's how I'd model them in ACKS. I wouldn't necessarily impose any punitive rules on them regarding their ability to craft, work stone, etc. More than that is a greater level of savagery than I think is needed or merited.

Historically, barbarian had 3 meanings:

1) One not a Greek.

2) One living outside the pale of the Roman empire and its civilization, applied especially to the northern nations that overthrew them.

3) One outside the pale of Christian civilization

Historian Christopher I. Beckwith summarizes, "the word barbarian embodies a complex European cultural construct for a 'powerful foreigner with uncouth, uncivilized, non-urban culture who was militarily skilled and somewhat heroic, but inclines to violence and cruelty' – yet not a 'savage' or a 'wild man'."

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbarian>

ACKS is more-or-less set in Late Antiquity, and barbarian is therefore going to refer to (2) with the addition of Professor Beckwith's adjectives.

Depending on your frame of reference, who the barbarian is can change dramatically! For instance:

The Romans were considered barbarians by the Greeks.

The Anglo-Saxons were considered barbarians by the Romans.

The Vikings were considered barbarians by the Anglo-Saxons.

The Laplanders were considered barbarians by the Vikings.

Low-Light Vision

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/low-light-vision>

September 15, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

golan2072 wrote:

I wish my Geckomen race to have low-light vision - that is, the ability to see very well in very dim light (such as starlight) and see farther in limited light (such as torchlight), but not in absolute darkness.

How would this be handled in game terms? How many powers would this be worth?

I always found low-light vision difficult to arbitrate in 3.5, and avoided it in ACKS. That said, the best mechanics I know of are those in the D20 SRD.

If you want to use it, I'd say its worth 1 custom power rather than 2. Unlike infravision, it doesn't let you see without any light whatsoever, making it less overpowering for thieves and assassin types in dark dungeons.

Custom Racial Classes Build Points 8 Level Limit 8

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/custom-racial-classes-build-points-8-level-limit-8>

October 15, 2013

Tag: Q&A

CharlesDM wrote:

Regarding Player's Companion Custom Racial Classes, why is the Build Points 8 Level Limit 8, instead of following the previous progression (-1) to 9?

I might almost think the small race that shall not be named had something to do with this ...

The loss of Stronghold and Follower features is so severe in a presumably domain-oriented game, I can't see ever creating a Build Point 8 class as is.

(Except, perhaps, for hypothetical races that eschew lofty goals like domain rulership, in which case I would rather make that a feature of the race, not the system.)

Just wondering ... Thanks!

The following explanation might help you understand why the 8-point builds are capped at 8th level.

The Elven Spellsword is the quintessential 7-point build. It gets the fighting ability of the Fighter and the spellcasting ability of a Mage, in exchange for slow leveling and a 10th level cap. At d6 hd, it's not as hardy as a Fighter, but still better than Mage.

Imagine if you told the player, your Elven Spellsword can actually get d8 HD; or your Elven Spellsword can get 33% more spells than a Mage; and all you have to do is take a 9th level cap instead of a 10th level cap.

EVERYONE would take that option. Because the difference between 9th level and 10th level is trivial relative to 33% more hit points, or 33% more spells.

But if you say "8th level cap", then it's a serious trade-off. You're giving up 5th level spells. You're losing 2 HD worth of hit points, attack throws, and damage bonus. You don't get your 2nd general proficiency. Etc.

In my actual campaigns, 8-point builds are usually seen on NPCs with After the Flesh and centuries of time to gain XP as undead.

CharlesDM then wrote:

Very good point. When using Build Point 8 After the Flesh advancement in your campaign, are Stronghold/Follower benefits still gained at 9 HD? Also, just curious, do you have a "rule of thumb" for how old ancient undead of a certain XP total must be, or do you simply create whatever fits the needs of the campaign?

1) No

2) I assume they will reach whatever level they'd have reached based on the maximum realm they controlled during their undeath, based on GP Threshold.

For instance, if an Undead Lich-King rules an Empire, he'll eventually get to 14th level from his Campaign XP. It might take a loooong time, but he's an Undead Lich-King.

No Bonus Spells Per Day from Higher Casting Stat?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/no-bonus-spells-day-higher-casting-stat>

May 27, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Slippery_Chicken wrote:

I noticed that Mages get bonus repertoire slots, but not bonus spells per day, from their casting stats.

Is this intentional? Is an 18 INT Mage only supposed to only have 1 spell per day at first level?

It's intentional that mages only get 1 spell at 1st level per day, regardless of INT.

If you give bonus spells, you are more-or-less doubling the combat power of the mage. This is a non-trivial adjustment to balance. It will make low-level ACKS much easier on the party. If you're ok with that and you want to race more quickly to the mid- and high-levels, it's a great choice. On the other hand, if you enjoy the "character-building" experience of low level, with all its trials and tribulations, it's the wrong choice.

Craftpriests, Machinists, Proficiencies

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/craftpriests-machinists-proficiencies>

November 18, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Nick Dalton wrote:

I've had ACKs for a while and am just now getting to it. I have a few questions about the Craftpriest and Machinist classes and proficiencies in general.

- 1. The text says a Craftpriest starts as a Journeyman (equivalent of 2 ranks) in a craft and can identify stuff on a 8+. A journeyman is worth two proficiencies in craft though, and by the general rule that every time you buy an additional proficiency rank in the same thing the difficulty drops by 4, shouldn't the throw value be 7+?*
- 2. Oddly, looking at the Dwarven Machinist in the PC: they are considered to be masters (3 ranks) and the throw value is 9+. Using the stacked proficiency logic, again, shouldn't it be 3+? (11 to 7 to 3) Also, FYI: The text refers to being able to supervise 3 apprentices, but it should be 4 according to the proficiency.*
- 3. What does the +3 bonus to attention to detail specifically apply to each class? For the Machinist, it says that the bonus is already built into to the craft ability, but it doesn't say that for the Craftpriest.*
- 4. You need 4 ranks with Engineering to be considered a specialist. So would the throw then would be -1+?*
- 5. Why can't I take the same Labor proficiency multiple times? How could I get better at it? I mean, no PC would want to, but it seems an odd restriction as it suggests that no one gets better at these things beyond a 50/50 toss.*

Thanks in advance for answering these.

Hi Nick,

These are great questions. I'll address them one by one.

1. The intent of the rules is that the target value for a proficiency throw improves by +4 if the proficiency doesn't provide for another benefit from taking it more than once. For Art, Crafting, and similar proficiencies the value of selecting the proficiency more than once comes in being more productive, not being better at able to identify works.

E.g. the difference between Craft (blacksmithing) and Knowledge (weaponsmithing) is that additional ranks in Craft will make you a better smith while additional ranks in Knowledge (blacksmithing) would make you better at identifying the great works of smiths.

The rules were not very clear in this regard and I apologize for their obscurity. In general, the +4 bonus will apply on proficiencies that either explicitly say so, or that simply say "A character may select this proficiency additional times."

2. This looks like errata. It should be 8+ and 4 apprentices.

3. It would apply to any proficiency with a target value. E.g. for the Craftpriest it has reduced the target value of their Theology throw from 11+ to 8+. "Because of their religious training, a craftpriest can automatically identify religious symbols, trappings, and holy days of the dwarven faith, and recognizes those of other faiths with a proficiency throw of 8+ on 1d20."

4. No, as per above. Increasing ranks in Engineering makes you able to build bigger structures, but it doesn't make you a better historian of engineering.

5. You'll note that for work-related proficiencies, taking extra proficiency slots means you are worth more gp per month. By definition, Labor proficiency is meant to include those fields of work which are insufficiently complex to be able to justify additional gp from superior knowledge.

If for some reason you needed to create a character who was an expert at, e.g., identifying agricultural history, you could use Knowledge (agriculture) instead of Labor (farming). If your society has a more advanced state of agricultural science, where the best farmers were much more productive, you could use Craft (farming).

I hope that helps!

Nick Dalton then wrote:

That's very clear. Thanks Alex.

Somewhat related question...whenever the text says a class has bonuses to saves or a proficiency bit like with the craftpriest and machinist, it's already figured in, correct? I ask because sometimes this is mentioned (dwarves and saves) and sometimes it is not (elves and saves).

It is already figured in, yes. If you compare the saving throws for elves versus comparable classes, for instance, you can see the effect of the bonuses.

Modifiers for Attributes Over 18

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/modifiers-attributes-over-18>

December 05, 2013

Tag: **New Material**

Marasmus wrote:

I was playing a game with a DM using a BECME module and I drank from a pool that had the possibility of lowering or raising stats, and ended up with a 20 DEX. My question is, what is the statistical methodology behind the stat bonuses, and how would it apply to "supernatural" ability scores like this? I would like for a 20 DEX to mean a +4 bonus to AC at least.

I checked the B/X Rules Cyclopedia and there was nothing in there about above 18 scores so I'm stumped.

You could use either of these choices:

18-19 +3

20-21 +4

22-23 +5

24-25 +6

etc

Or

18 +3

19-20 +4

21-23 +5

24-25 +6

27 +7

28-29 +8

30-32 +9

etc

SClaytonU then wrote:

Not to gainsay the game's lead developer, but given the mathematical progression of the attribute modifiers within the 3-18 range, wouldn't gaining another +1 for every number over 18 be more appropriate? Alternately, you could actually invert the math progression and begin gaining larger bonuses for each number above 19, but that would quickly get ridiculous (a +13 at Dex 22, for example).

In any event, since only PCs and NPCs have attribute bonuses (monsters just use their HD for such things), and since there are so few ways to increase one's stats after character creation (especially beyond 18), what's the harm in allowing those who somehow manage superhuman attributes to gain superhuman benefit?

That's an honest question, not a merely rhetorical one.

Hello SClaytonU,

You can gainsay me as much as you'd like. ACKS is more-or-less a tinkerer's game and every campaign is a law unto itself, etc.

What I was offering in the 2 progressions above was:

1) An assumption that the bonus terminates at a limit of +1 per 2 attribute points, with 19 as a "hidden" companion to 18; or

2) An assumption that the bonus is "wavy" such as it increases by 1/3, then 1/2, then 1/1, then 1/2, then 1/3, then 1/2, then 1/1, then 1/2, then 1/3.

But you absolutely could assume the bonus terminates at a limit of +1 per attribute point, or develop a progression that increases the bonus exponentially (so that a half-point 18.5 gives +4, 19 gives +5, 19.33 gives +6, etc.).

Tywyll then wrote:

I've actually been wrestling with this very thing especially in regards to Str/giant Str. While B/X x2 damage is simple it leaves some troublesome inconsistencies for me (specifically why doesn't it grant a bonus to hit?). I know this legacy from when everything did 1d6 in the LBB except giants who did an amazing 2d6.

Anyway I've been looking at AD&D but the exceptional strength throws everything. I think continuing to increase accuracy and damage bonus at the same rate has definite potential problems (because AC doesn't increase as quickly).

Anyway I do like those charts.

Tywyll, this might help you parse out to handle.

Ability Scores for Monsters

In ACKS, human and demi-human characters are assigned ability scores between 3 and 18 in Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, Dexterity, Constitution, and Charisma, representing their ability in these areas relative to the human average of 10.

Monsters can also be assigned ability scores. For simplicity, we assume most monsters are average specimens of their species, with ability scores ranging from 9 and 12, with 10 being the average for the monster's species. Note that a monster's ability scores are *not* measured against the human average. A horse with INT 18 is smart *for a horse* but is not capable of tool use or mathematics. A giant with STR 7 is quite weak *for a giant* but is still considerably stronger than a man!

As with human and demi-human characters, a monstrous ability score of less than 9 or greater than 12 will provide a bonus or penalty on rolls and throws related to the ability score. Except as noted below, the bonus or penalty is identical to that for human and demi-human characters.

Strength: Apply the standard bonus or penalty from Strength to all attack throws in melee. The bonus or penalty to damage rolls, however, is adjusted by how damaging the monster's natural attacks are. Cross-reference the monster's STR score with its average damage from each attack on the table below to find the bonus or penalty to that attacks' damage rolls.

Ability Score	2 or less	3 – 6	7-12	13-24	25 or more
3	-2	-3	-6	-8	-12
4	-1	-2	-5	-7	-10
5	-1	-2	-4	-6	-8
6	0	-1	-3	-4	-6
7	0	-1	-2	-3	-4
8	0	-1	-1	-2	-3
9	0	0	0	-1	-2
10	0	0	0	0	0
11	0	0	0	0	0
12	0	0	0	+1	+2
13	0	+1	+1	+2	+3
14	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
15	0	+1	+3	+4	+6
16	+1	+2	+4	+6	+8
17	+1	+2	+5	+7	+10
18	+2	+3	+6	+8	+12

EXAMPLE #1: A dragon turtle deals 1d8 points of damage (4.5 average) with its claws and 1d6x10 (35 average) with its bite. A dragon turtle with STR 18 deals 1d8+3 points of damage with its claws and 1d6x10+12 with its bite.

EXAMPLE #2: An ordinary hawk deals 1d2 points of damage (1.5 average) with its talons. An ordinary hawk with STR 4 deals 1d2-1 points of damage with its talons. An ordinary hawk with STR 18 deals 1d2+2.

Tywyll then wrote:
I love this! Thanks Alex.

So the only question to me becomes how could a belt of (hill) giant strength be changed to be consistent with the above (and allow for belts of bigger giant strength)?

Rule: Double the character's damage dice and double the STR modifier to damage when a belt of giant strength is worn.

Explanation: A hill giant (defaulting to STR 10) does 2d8 damage. He is assumed to be wielding a spear with two-hands. In a man-sized creature, this deals 1d8 damage. In a hill giant-sized creature, this deals 2d8 damage, or double damage. (From this we can conclude that a hill giant is roughly twice as strong as a normal man.)

Assume the hill giant has STR 18. Consulting the table from Lairs & Encounters above, we see that when average damage is 9, STR 18 provides +6 to damage. Therefore a STR 18 hill giant deals 2d8+6.

Note that the +6 bonus is twice as great as a human's +3 bonus, which makes sense because the hill giant is roughly twice as strong. (The hill giant does not get +6 to attack throws, however, just +3.)

Mystic's Meditative Focus

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/mystics-meditative-focus>

April 07, 2014

Tag: **Q&A**

Demons_eye wrote:

Sorry if this has been asked before but I can not find it on the forum. Can the Mystic's Meditative Focus be used more than once at a time? Meaning everything stacks for a +2 to a lot of things?

No, it cannot stack with itself!

Law and Chaos (and apologies!)

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/auran-empire/law-and-chaos-and-apologies>

April 16, 2014

Tag: Q&A

CountMRVHS wrote:

That's right, an alignment thread. I'm sure some veteran posters out there have heard it all before, so apologies beforehand.

I'm having trouble nailing the Law/Chaos thing. I guess more specifically, in what way is taking a Lawful alignment "choosing a side"? How active must a character be in order to "side with humanity"? The setting info posted on this site mentions that most Neutral characters enjoy the protection of Law... at what point does a Neutral character shift to Lawful? When he takes up a sword and starts hacking up lizardmen in the name of the Auran Empire?

It's also hard for me not to map Law and Chaos onto Good and Evil, despite the fact that the setting info says this is not the case.

I like the tone that is established by a Law/Chaos alignment rather than the more complex 9-alignment model. But I'm not sure if, say, an adventuring barbarian who just wants to hack down some doors and kill a few trolls should be considered Neutral (because he doesn't give much thought to morality) or Lawful (because he vents his adventuring energies upon beastmen).

I think I need some examples to clarify this. Any takers?

Law and Chaos in my own campaigns are much closer to their portrayal in Three Hearts and Three Lions than to their portrayal in the Eternal Champion series.

Premises in the Auran Empire setting are:

1. The nature of man means man flourishes in a civilization
2. Civilization must be forged by struggle against uncivilized forces
3. Civilization is inherently fragile because the flourishing life enjoyed by the citizens of a successful civilization erodes the virtues which give the strength needed to defend the civilization against uncivilized forces.

Civilization in this context means "rule of law" in the sense that term was understood in classical Greece and Rome, medieval England, etc. - as compared to the despotic rule of god-kings or the capricious rule of a bandit chief.

300 is an example of Law (the free Greeks) opposed to Chaos (the despotic Persian God-King).

Lawful characters are those who struggle to build or sustain civilization* against uncivilized forces.

Neutral characters are those who seek to enjoy the fruits of civilization, and have no wish to see it torn down, but do not personally struggle to support it, though they might admire those who do.

Chaotic characters are those who actively struggle to tear down man's civilization, either because it will benefit them personally, because they are innate enemies of man, or because they just want to see the world burn.

Law, as a metaphysical force, explains why the world follows natural laws; why man has a nature; and because that nature is reasonable and social, why he flourishes in a society of reason. Lawful gods are gods of civilization, nobility, knowledge, reason, justice, etc. It is theistic humanism.

Chaos, as a metaphysical force, appears in the unpredictable randomness in nature (fire, earthquakes, storms); and in those personal vices which destabilized civilization. It also encompasses all that is alien and inimical to man. It is nihilism in its original sense - "no being", constant change.

The Auran Empire is the most successful polity in the world's history, and as such represents what is best in Law. However, its very success has corrupted it - soft senators and ruthless merchants indulge in idle luxury in Aura while the borders grow weaker. Scions of noble houses prefer to watch the chariot races than become cavalry officers. Chaos seduces from within (through vice) while menacing from without (through physical destruction in the form of beastmen and similar creatures).

All of this is a simplification of the classical thinkers like Aristotle in the Ethics and the Politics, much of Cicero, and Machievelli's Discoures, combined with Anderson's explanation of Law and Chaos.

Mechanist Special Ability Restrictions

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/mechanist-special-ability-restrictions>

April 23, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Boomishtendency wrote:

The companion guide states that:

The machinist is limited to creating automatons with HD no more than twice his class level and with a number of special abilities no greater than his class level.

I had a question of interpretation. When calculating special abilities does one count all positive special abilities that have been sunk into the automaton or only the number of special abilities that remain on balance after restrictions have been added. So for instance, if a first level character takes the personal automaton proficiency allowing for a personal automaton of up to 7000 gold and the character bases his design upon the Ornithopter example from the class.

If it has 1 HD, excludes the standard immunities, keeps the default movement rate, adds flying (+1), adds hover (+1), add passenger capacity (+1), removes attack (-1), and requires operator (-1). +1, +1, +1, -1, -1 = 1

This would fall within the 7k gold amount the proficiency provides. However, is the number of powers that count against the mechanist's level calculated at the end, here 1, or is it the total number of beneficial abilities given regardless of detractions added to reduce cost and time, here 3.

It's the net special abilities, so in your example, 1.

Border Forts in Periods of Economic Boom

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/border-forts-periods-economic-boom>

April 26, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Boomishtendency wrote:

I'm confused about the combination of two rules. I'm starting a game with one character who is an explorer. I may be splitting hairs here, but is there an easy resolution that doesn't overwrite either rule?

Rule 1

"If a wilderness domain ever reaches the maximum of 125 families x 16 6-mile hexes (2,000 families), it becomes a borderlands domain. If a borderlands domain ever reaches the maximum of 250 families x 16 6-mile hexes (4,000 families), it becomes a civilized domain."

Rule 2

"Border forts must be located in a borderlands or wilderness area."

(This may only apply to establishing the stronghold)

Assuming the explorer has a successful reign and manages to push his borderlands civilization to the 4k family mark, I'm confused about what happens to the border fort. I imagine one of three possibilities.

- 1. Rule 2 trumps and the progress of civilization halts due to the policies of the ruler. (Seems unlikely)*
- 2. Rule 1 trumps and the PC is evicted or leaves due to "too much bureaucracy" for the peaceful isolation of a less populated land. Possibly transitions control of the territory over to a henchman vassal. (No fun for the PC.)*
- 3. Ignore the rule conflict and we end up with an area that is technically civilized but whose ruler has some odd customs. (Seems palatable but duct-tapey given the explicit restriction stated earlier)*

I also have a player who is interested in trying to garrison exclusively using small number of elite troops, eventually all cataphracts, by utilizing Manual of Arms. I believe I read in one of the mercenary forum posts that up to 25% of mercenaries will tend to become 1st level after their years of combat. If PC's were allowed to draw henchman from trained mercenaries is that 25% rate adjusted upwards at all with a unit's training and battle rating?

The intent of the rule is that border forts can only be initially established in borderlands or wilderness. If later growth causes the domain to become civilized, that might lead to wistful brooding and melancholy storytelling by the aged explorer, but it doesn't prevent him from continuing to grow and rule his domain.

Spell-like Proficiencies - Declarations Required?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/spell-proficiencies-declarations-required>

June 08, 2014

Tag: **Q&A**

jedavis wrote:

So I'm looking at rolling either a mod-nightblade or a ridiculous kung-fu monk class using proficiencies/custom powers that let you use spells at certain intervals (per ACKSPC 98). I'm curious, though - if one intends to use such a proficiency in combat, does it require pre-declaration like any other spell? Likewise, can it be interrupted? My natural inclination is yes to both (as the wording is "grant the class the ability to cast a spell", which suggests that all normal casting limitations should apply), but I just sort of want to make sure.

Yes, it's intended to be a spell-like casting, similar to using a scroll.

To build a spell-like proficiency that is available as an action in lieu of attacking, treat the spell as one level higher than it is for purposes of availability.

Armor and Assassins

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/armor-and-assassins>

July 14, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Link wrote:

Quote from the assassin class:

"When wearing leather armor or lighter grab, an assassin may move silently, hide in shadows, and backstab as a thief of the same level. If wearing armor heavier than leather these abilities are not available."

My question is can an assassin keep the backstab and other thief skills if wearing +2 ringmail? The magic armor would be lighter than leather.

The official ruling is that it is not permitted. Every campaign being a law unto itself, feel free to change it if you'd like. (Just be ready for thieves to insist on being able to wear +3 chain, explorers to wear +2 plate, and so on.)

Variant/Specialist Wizards

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/variantspecialist-wizards>

July 22, 2014

Tag: **Insight**

nDervish wrote:

I've placed my game in an offshoot of the Red Tide setting and I'm getting to the point of wanting to start converting some of the variant caster classes from Crimson Pandect. These classes are all arcane caster types, but each of them has a selection of unique spells and limited access to the general Magic User spell list.

The same basic concept has appeared in various official D&D versions in the form of specialist caster classes, such as Illusionists or Necromancers, who can cast a wider range of spells within their specialty (often including some which are not available to a generalist Magic User) in exchange for losing access to other spells.

Has anyone done something like this in ACKS previously?

The obvious (to me) approach would be to assign custom Source modifiers for each such class, then build their custom spells (and adjust the levels of standard spells) based on that, but this seems like it would tend to produce a good deal of unnecessary work with assigning 11 Source modifiers per class while trying to remain balanced.

The other extreme would be to just treat it as plain old arcane magic with different special effects/trappings on their spells (e.g., The Kuan Amelatu "Call of the Grave" spell is just a no-range "Fireball" that only affects enemies.), but that feels a bit flat and loses what I consider to be the entire point of specialist wizards: They can't do as many things, but, what they can do, they do better than anyone else. (e.g., A Gadaal Astromancer can't cast any direct damage spells doing more than 2d6 damage, but nobody else comes close to their ability to see the future and manipulate fate.) They don't just know a different set of spells than a normal Mage, they know spells that a Mage isn't even capable of casting and vice-versa.

ACKS reflects specialization within the mage class in four ways:

1. A mage's spell repertoire.
2. A mage's spell signature.
3. A mage's proficiencies (e.g. Transmogrification or Black Lore)
4. A mage's personally-researched (unique) spells.

What it never does is reduce the ability of mages to learn spells of a particular type in exchange for making the mage more powerful. So if the current specialization mechanics are not robust enough for you, that would be the area to focus.

Flat Thief Abilities

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/flat-thief-abilities>

May 10, 2014

Tag: **New Material**

Alex wrote:

One of the legacies of ACKS is that thief abilities use a per-level throw value while other proficiencies have throw values that are flat and increase by +4 when additional ranks are taken.

The result of this legacy rule is that thief abilities are notoriously unreliable at early levels; and by the time their abilities become reliable, thieves find themselves lackluster in comparison to spellcasters who can cast Find Traps, Knock, and Telekinesis.

In creating the Player's Companion, I worked out a series of constants representing what the effective value of an ability at a particular level of experience is. This is how the trade-offs for class powers are calculated. For example, a power at 7th level is worth about half a power at 1st level. This same math allowed me to work out the following flat target values for thief skills:

Open Locks 12+

Find and Remove Traps 13+

Pick Pockets 11+

Move Silently 12+

Climb Walls 4+

Hide in Shadows 14+

Hear Noise 10+

As an optional rule, instead of having a variable target value with level, give the thief (or other class) these flat target values when he selects the class power.

A thief who selects the same power again (or spends a proficiency rank) gains +4 on his throw.

I'm contemplating including this as a rule in the "Hero Conqueror King" supplement. As a player, would you choose the traditional ability progression or would you choose the flat values?

Alternatively, what about a system with slightly higher target values and a minor but still credible advancement per level progression?

NOTE: Hijinks would need a second look, I know.

Here is one other alternative way to do it.

1. Thief abilities may be purchased as a bundle of 8 abilities which begin at the following target values: open locks 21+, find traps 18+, remove traps 21+, pick pockets 21+, move silently 21+, hide in shadows 21+, climb walls 12+, hear noise 18+.

2. At first level, a thief has 22 points he can spend to reduce these target values.

3. Each level thereafter, the thief gains 8 additional points.

This would allow a first level thief to specialize a bit.

Another option would be to allow the thief to pick one of four or five pre-generated templates at 1st level. For example:

Mechanist: Open Locks 12+, Find Traps 13+, Remove Traps 13+, Pick Pockets 21+, Move Silently 21+, Hide in Shadows 21+, Climb Walls 12+, Hear Noise 18+

Stalker: Open Locks 21+, Find Traps 18+, Remove Traps 21+, Pick Pockets 21+, Move Silently 10+, Hide in Shadows 10+, Climb Walls 12+, Hear Noise 18+

Cat Burglar: Open Locks 16+, Find Traps 18+, Remove Traps 21+, Pick Pockets 21+, Move Silently 16+, Hide in Shadows 16+, Climb Walls 5+, Hear Noise 18+

Here is another variant. This has the same mathematical value as the standard thief progression, but it offers better scores upfront with slower progress overtime. It's better for levels 1-5, worse for levels 7+.

Level	Open Locks	Find & Remove Traps	Pick Pockets*	Move Silently	Climb Walls	Hide in Shadows	Hear Noise
1	14	14	13	14	6	16	14
2	14	14	13	13	5	15	13
3	13	13	12	13	5	14	12
4	13	13	12	12	4	14	11
5	12	12	11	12	4	14	10
6	12	12	11	11	4	14	9
7	11	11	10	11	3	12	8
8	11	11	10	10	3	10	7
9	10	10	9	10	3	8	6
10	10	10	9	9	2	6	5
11	9	9	8	9	2	4	4
12	9	9	8	8	2	3	3
13	8	8	7	8	1	2	2
14	8	8	7	7	1	1	1

ALSO, many of the house rules linked above were excellent - thank you of reminding me of them. I will read them closely as I work on ACKS Heroic Fantasy...

After reviewing the discussion and the various house-rules linked above, I think I am going to test the following in my next game(s).

UPDATED RULES

Encumbrance and Thievery: Thieves benefit from being light on their feet. If the character's encumbrance is 5 stones or less, he gains a +2 bonus on throws to hide in shadows and move silently. If the character's encumbrance is 2 stones or less, the bonus is increased to +4. The bonuses do not apply to hijinks.

Open Locks: Each attempt to pick a lock requires 10 minutes. A thief may try again if he fails to pick a lock. However, if a thief rolls a natural 1 while attempting to pick a lock, he has broken his thieves' tools.

Remove Traps: Each attempt to disarm a trap requires 10 minutes. A thief may try again if he fails to disarm a trap. However, if a thief rolls a natural 1 while attempting to disarm a trap, he has set off the trap.

NEW EQUIPMENT:

Armor oil: Lubricating oil which quiets the creaking and squeaking of leather armor. The encumbrance of oiled armor can be ignored when moving silently for the purposes of the encumbrance and thievery rules. A pint of armor oil will keep a suit of armor oiled for one week. Cost: 2gp.

Cloak, camouflage: A cloak woven with a colored pattern that makes its wearer harder to see. Camouflaged cloaks are available in a variety of colors and patterns for various environments. If the cloak's camouflage is appropriate to the environment, the cloak adds a +2 bonus to any proficiency throws to hide in shadows, avoid being spotted, and evade in the wilderness. Characters wearing appropriate camouflage cloaks can always hide in shadows or avoid being spotted with a throw of at least 18+. It imposes a -2 penalty if the camouflage is inappropriate to the environment. The bonus and penalty do not apply to hijinks. Cost: 15gp.

Ear Trumpet: A funnel-shaped tube of silver, wood, shell, or horn that, when placed in its wearer's ear canal, raises the apparent volume of sound. A character using an ear trumpet gains a +2 bonus to proficiency throws to hear noise. The bonus does not apply to hijinks. Cost: 15gp.

Padded Rigging: A series of belts, straps, pads, and harnesses designed to keep items securely fastened and protectively enclosed. A character wearing padded rigging can ignore up to 1 stone worth of equipment for purposes of the encumbrance and thievery rules. Cost: 5gp.

Padded Shoes: A pair of padded shoes with soft heels that grant a +2 bonus to proficiency throws to move silently. Padded shoes are ruined if worn in badlands, hills, mountains, swamps, or woods, or in water. Cost: 15gp.

Rope, Knotted Climbing: A rope of silk or hemp, carefully knotted at arm length intervals to aid in easy climbing. Any character may climb a knotted climbing rope with a proficiency throw of 2+, adjusted by the better of the character's Strength or Dexterity modifier. Cost: 2gp.

Thieves' Tools, Superior: Superior thieves' tools grant a +1 bonus to proficiency throws to open locks and remove traps. If the thief rolls a natural 1 while attempting to pick a lock, the tools may make a saving throw versus Death (at 1/2 thief's level of experience) to resist breaking. The bonus does not apply to hijinks. Cost: 200gp.

Thieves' Tools, Masterwork: Masterwork thieves' tools grant a +2 to proficiency throws to open locks and remove traps. If the thief rolls a natural 1 while attempting to pick a lock, the tools may make a saving throw versus Death (at the thief's level) to resist breaking. The bonus does not apply to hijinks. Cost: 1,600gp.

Weapon Blackener: A sealing caulk which, when applied to weapons, permanently darkens their material. The encumbrance of blackened weapons can be ignored when hiding in shadows for purposes of the encumbrance and thievery rules. A pint of weapon blackener will suffice for one two-handed weapon, two one-handed weapons, or twenty arrows or quarrels. Cost: 10gp.

DESIGNER'S NOTES

First, since these rules don't alter the throw values for the thief skills, they don't require any changes to the proficiency or class-build system. They also don't require adjusting the hijinks mathematics, which would be a complex endeavor.

Second, they reduce the frustration resulting from a single point of failure. A thief can now attempt to pick a lock or remove a trap repeatedly, with only time and the risk of damage to the thief or his tools serve as obstacles to repeated attempts.

Third, they introduce relatively low-cost equipment that offers thieves an improved chance of success in their core tasks - picking locks, removing traps, hiding in shadows, and moving silently. However, the equipment does not stack with common magic items (such as wands of knock, rings of invisibility, ropes of climbing or elven cloaks) so it does not increase late-game power very much.

Fourth, they reward thieves for staying light and nimble and differentiate between thieves laden with shiny weapons, loose coin, and creaky armor, and stealthier types.

EXAMPLE in PLAY:

Rollo, a 2nd level thief, wears oiled leather armor, padded shoes (+2 to move silently), and a dark grey camouflaged cloak (+2 to hide in shadows); he wields a blackened long sword and blackened dagger; and he carries masterwork thieves' tools (+2), grappling hook, and 50' knotted rope in padded rigging. His encumbrance is $4\frac{3}{6}$. Padded rigging reduces this to $3\frac{3}{6}$. For purposes of moving silently, his encumbrance is $1\frac{3}{6}$ (+4 bonus), for purposes of hiding in shadows it is $3\frac{1}{6}$ (+2 bonus).

Open Locks 15+ (30% success instead of 20% - 1.5x and see below)

Find Traps 17+

Remove Traps 15+ (30% success instead of 20% - 1.5x and see below)

Pick Pockets 16+

Move Silently 10+ (55% success instead of 20% - almost 3x)

Hide in Shadows 14+ (35% success instead of 15% - more than 2x)

Climb Walls 6+

At 1 in 6 every 2 turns, a wandering monster typically results every 12 turns. Let's use 6 and 12 turns as the number of turns a thief can attempt to open a lock or remove a trap. With 6 tries at 30% success, the thief has an 89% chance of success. With 12 tries at 30% success, the thief has a 99% chance of success. (I have disregard the chance of breakage / setting off the trap).

Chivalric Orders for Fighters

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/chivalric-orders-fighters>

August 04, 2014

Tag: Q&A

capheind wrote:

At what level should a fighter be able to join a chivalric order? What could be a better perk to playing the oft-overlooked fighter than getting the right to chivalric devices, storage in an abbey or such (order of the garter, etc), and the ability to pay off a fraternal brother of their chivalric order to post ransom for their return (thus keeping any enemy capable of understanding the idea of a ransom from killing them.)

The ACKS method of determining this would be to determine how many members are in the order, and then use that to reverse-engineer what the lowest level members would have to be in order for there to be a sufficient quantity of fighters in the order.

For example, in a realm of 6,000,000 people, there are about 285 8th level fighters, 100 9th level fighters, and about 70 of above that level. If you want the order to have 100 members, you might say that it will accept 8th level and above, meaning around 20% of the top tier.

EDIT: I copied the wrong column down from my spreadsheet. Fighter types would only be about 40% of the above numbers. Sorry for the resulting panic I have caused!

Are Armor Restrictions Guided More By the Actual Weight or the Form of the Armor?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/are-armor-restrictions-guided-more-actual-weight-or-form-armor>

December 12, 2014

Tag: Q&A

wmarshal wrote:

(This question came to me while I'm at work, so I don't have my books available to double check this, but also don't want to risk forgetting it as I transition from leaving work and dealing with everything else I have to this weekend. So apologies n advance if this has already been covered.)

There are at least a couple of places in ACKS where a rule has been made in respect to the type of armor worn. Barbarian class adventurers can only wear chain mail or lighter. The Running proficiency can only be used when wearing chain mail or lighter. If a player is wearing plate mail +3 should he be treated as if he's wearing chain mail or lighter armor since the plate mail +3 does weigh less than regular chain mail?

In general it's based on the form, not the weight, but as always feel free to modify the rules as needed for your campaign!

Chapter 3: Equipment

Henchmen XP Share

<http://autarch.co/forum/henchman-xp-share-0>

March 21, 2012

Tag: Q&A

demoss wrote:

"The totals for each monster defeated are calculated and added to the value of all XP from treasure, and the sum for all XP is divided among all surviving party members and henchmen evenly, with henchmen receiving a 1/2 share each."

Does this mean henchmen are allocated a full share, of which half is lost, or are they allocated a half share to start with?

Example: 1000XP split among 4 PCs and 2 henchman.

A. $1000XP / 6 = 166XP$. PCs get 166XP each, henchmen 83XP each.

B. $1000XP / 5 = 200XP$. PCs get 200XP each, henchmen 100XP each.

It's B.

Hi guys! I can't claim any particular familiarity about how this was officially handled in prior iterations of D&D and related games. In ACKS, the henchmen are treated as 1/2 a player character.

Example: 1 PC and 2 Henchmen find 1,000gp. XP is divided as follows: $(1000 / (1 + .5 + .5)) = 1000 / 2 = 500$. PC earns 500xp and each henchman earns 250xp, for a total of 1,000xp earned on 1,000gp.

If you were to apply the alternative approach, the math would work as follows: $(1000 / 3) = 333$. PC earns 333xp and each henchman earns 161xp, for a total of 666xp earned from 1000gp. This method thus imposes a steep penalty (34%) on xp earned relative to the amount of gold collected.

Additionally, ACKS approach means that henchmen are a bargain--you get the value of another character, but only pay 1/2 the xp. In the alternative approach, taking henchmen is a net drain on your party's xp.

Since players respond to incentives, ACKS method leads to more use of henchmen than the alternative, which is a desired outcome.

Henchmen and their Phat Loots

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/henchmen-and-their-phat-loots>

March 25, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

What do Henchpeople do with their share of treasure? I ask this because I sort of assume that PCs are responsible for their gear, their room and board, and pretty much everything while they are employed by said PC. So...do they just wench and wine their money away while the PC covers everything else, or do they need to keep track of food and rent separately? Do they buy their own equipment upgrades (I'd assume they wouldn't... but what if the PCs skimp on them?).

Basically, I've been treating it that they have to be taken care of entirely by the PCs and their money essentially 'disappears' once they are paid (and can spend it/put it in a bank). This seems like the easiest thing to do and keeps me from needing a spread sheet for every retainers monthly incomings and outgoings.

But is this what was intended?

You said it precisely: Henchmen have to be taken care of entirely by the PCs. Their money essentially 'disappears' once they are paid.

I like to joke that the henchmen spend their money on their Reserve XP fund so that when they die they can return as higher level henchmen. ;)

Normal Men and Mercenaries

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/normal-men-and-mercenaries>

March 27, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

Tywill wrote:

Ok I'm sure I'm missing the forest for the trees but....

What page are the stats for 'Normal Men' on? What are their hd and weapon/armor profs? Please give me the pg because I cannot find it.

Also are the mercenaries you hire level 1 fighters or normal Men?

Most (75%) of mercenaries are 0th level. 25% are 1st level fighters or explorers.

I apologize that I wasn't more specific about this in the Core Rules, but it is detailed in Domains at War.

Conscripted peasants are normal men. They have 1d4 hit points each, fight and save as normal men, and have -2 morale. Such conscripts can be improved through training.

Mercenaries are also normal men, but their training has made them slightly better in combat. They have 1d4+1 hit points each, fight and save as normal men, and have morale appropriate to their level of training (generally +0 to +2).

Veteran mercenaries are 1st level fighters. They have 1d8 hit points* each, fight and save as fighters, do +1 damage with their weapons, and have morale scores 1 point higher than the morale they had as 0th level fighters.

*In general consider 1d4 to provide 3 hit points, 1d4+1 to provide 4 hit points, and 1d8 to provide 5 hit points. A mercenary would never lose hit points by becoming a veteran.

Mercenary & Follower Level Question

<http://autarch.co/forum/mercenary-follower-level-question-0>

March 19, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Minor Inconvenience wrote:

It appears that mercenaries are ordinarily 0th level characters. Are the Elf and Dwarf mercenaries that can be hired (as opposed to Fastness and Vault followers, which are specifically mentioned to be 1st level) 0th level too? Or are they considered to be 1st level? Just a question that occurred to me while playing around with the domain rules.

Completely untrained human conscripts are very weak: HD 1/2, hp3, Attack Throw 11+, Save NM.

75% of human mercenaries are 0th level characters with some training: HD 1-1, hp4, Attack Throw 11+, Save Normal Man. 25% of mercenaries are veterans, 1st level fighters: HD 1, hp5, Attack Throw 10+, Damage By Weapon +1, Save F1.

Dwarven mercenaries are 1HD monsters, as per the stats in the Monsters section. Elven mercenaries are 1+1HD monsters, as per the stats in the Monsters section. They are effectively veterans and 1st level.

Reaction Rolls and Hiring Retainers

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/reaction-rolls-and-hiring-retainers>

April 23, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

Tywyll wrote:

How do bonuses work with the charm effect of Mystic Aura? Does it work only on a 10+ regardless of cha, or does cha and seduction work for it as well?

*Further do things like mystic Aura and Seduction add to hiring rolls which is a reaction roll?
I can see arguments both ways.*

For Mystic Aura, Charisma and Seduction modifiers would definitely apply.

I would allow Mystic Aura to apply to any hiring roll. I'd allow Seduction to apply if relevant (e.g. exotic Amazon hiring doughty mercenaries).

Animal Training & Training Times

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/animal-trainer-training-times>

May 01, 2012

Tag: Q&A

MichaelPfaff wrote:

Eh. This is tripping me up again.

Ok, I have some characters who have stumbled upon 3 wyvern hatchlings. They want to train them for riding / war.

I have an exotic trainer that can do this for them. He charges 250gp per month, based on the trainer rules.

However, since commissioning is supposed to incorporate the trainer's fees, does this mean exotic trainers go faster than the 1gp per day for animals?

Let's say I set the price of a trained riding wyvern as 1000gp (just making that up). Typically, by the commissioning rules, it'd cost 1000 days (1gp/day) to train the wyvern to ride. However, 1000 days is like 30 months. The fees for the trainer would then be 7500gp if charged 250gp for each month. So, the riding wyvern suddenly has a training value of 7500gp vs. the listed value of 1000gp... Which, is out of sync it seems.

I guess my real question is, how should I handle exotic mounts being trained? How should I set prices of the training, the value of the mount, etc. And, how does this work with the 1gp per day animal training time?

Great question. The 1gp/day for animals was based on the price of a common animal trainer (25gp/month). Exotic animals can be trained at 10gp/day, but they cost roughly 10x as much as a comparable mount to train, because the skills of the trainers are so rare and expensive.

For example, a heavy warhorse costs 700gp. It's a 3HD monster. A griffon or pegasus is probably comparable in training needs, but is rare, so trainers will be hard to find. So set the cost of training a griffon at 7,000gp, occurring at 10gp per day. So it will take 700 days.

Encumbrance

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/encumbrance>

May 10, 2012

Tag: Q&A

DrPete wrote:

So this might be nitpicky, but... do clothes and containers count as items for encumbrance purposes? I guess I don't mean for strange cases where you decide to get 20 bags, but just in general.

I ask in part because several of the starting packages would be, for example, just under 7 stone if you don't count them, but just above 7 stone if you do. Are these packages at all "optimized" to keep characters from crossing an encumbrance threshold, or are they just a decent selection of starting goodies that we might need to pare down to keep from being weighted down?

To answer your question:

- 1) Worn clothing does not count for encumbrance purposes.
- 2) A backpack or belt pouch, being worn, do not count for encumbrance purposes. A sack, being carried, does.
- 3) The equipment provided in the templates was *NOT* optimized for encumbrance purposes.

The items in your backpack do count, yes.

Encumbrance Thresholds

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/encumbrance-thresholds>

June 25, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

Ludanto wrote:

I couldn't find this anywhere else, so I'll ask:

Are 7 daggers 1 stone or two?

Are 1,001 gold coins 1 stone, or two?

Even weirder, are 999 gold coins 1 stone, or weightless?

(And to keep things consistent: 5 daggers, 1 stone or nada?)

Thanks!

7 daggers would be $1 \frac{1}{6}$ stone because it's 6 items to a stone.

1,001 gold coins would be 1 stone.

In general, treat 150 coins as $\frac{1}{6}$ stone or 1 small item.

Ludanto, if you want a more detailed encumbrance system, you could easily whip up some intermediate movement rates between 120' and 90', 90' and 60', and so on.

Most gamers tend to ignore encumbrance, it seems, so we wanted to offer a system that was simple enough that it wouldn't be ignored, while still slowing down heavily-laden characters.

Spears May be Shattered

<http://autarch.co/forums/house-rules/spears-may-be-shattered>

June 23, 2012

Tag: **New Material**

Alex wrote:

One of the few persistent complaints I've seen regarding ACKS is that we made Spears slightly *too* awesome: Useable with one or two hands, throwable, able to attack from the second rank, able to set for charge, their only downside is that they are encumbering and easier to sunder. While I can make arguments for the reality that the spear was the ultimate weapon of ancient warfare for thousands of years, it still might be too much for your campaign.

Therefore I offer the following house rule:

Spears May Be Shattered

When attacking with a spear, an attack throw of natural 1 results in a non-magical spear's haft being broken. A magical spear's haft is damaged. A magical spear can be damaged a number of times equal to its bonus before its haft is broken. A spear with a broken haft can be used as a dagger or a quarterstaff, but no longer functions as a spear.

A nonmagical or magical spear can be repaired by setting the spearhead onto a new shaft, which costs 1gp and requires 1 rank of Craft (weaponsmithing).

Sale of Loot?

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/sale-loot>

July 17, 2012

Tag: Q&A

The Wyzard wrote:

I assume that there are limitations on what kind of loot can be sold in markets of a given class. It doesn't make sense to me that the PCs could sell really high-value gems or whatnot in any normal village, or even fairly large towns.

But I can't find anything in the book stating precisely how to deal with this. I expect I just don't know where to look.

So, help me out: How much and what kind of treasure can PCs turn into liquid assets in any given size of community? I assume that if they have thousands of GP that they want to make portable, I can assume there are gems available according to the guidelines on the chart in the Equipment chapter.

Ludanto then wrote:

"Mercantile Ventures" (p142) might be useful to you, although it seems to apply to bulk items more than individual items.

I think you can also just reuse the Market Class tables. The chances of finding a buyer being about on par with finding a seller.

Also, I think it was stated somewhere that gems are effectively high-value money and don't need to be "sold" so much unless you're just trying to make change.

(Not an official answer. I suppose I should have waited since this is the "Ask the Autarchs" forum.)

Ludanto's answer is the same I'd give. In general, if PCs want to sell goods, you can simply reverse the Equipment Availability chart and/or use the Mercantile rules, depending on the type of good they want to sell.

For example, using the Equipment Availability by Market Class table, if your PCs are in a Class VI town and want to sell a 600gp suit of baroque silver-coated plate armor, they'd have a 5% chance of finding a buyer.

Gems and jewelry can be treated as liquid wealth.

Hireling Availability

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/hireling-availability>

July 25, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

Equipment availability specifically says "per month". Hireling availability doesn't so much. Are hirelings meant to "refresh" each month? It seems reasonable with henchmen (I guess), but what if I'm in a village and I manage to roll 5% to find an alchemist. Does that alchemist move out of town for the next 20 months (on average)? Is the tiny village just keeping him really busy somehow? Or is it, failing the roll, sorry, this town doesn't have an alchemist and probably never will?

How is this supposed to work between henchmen, mercenaries and specialists?

Thanks!

The availability is intended to be per month, yes.

All of these rules are meant to be guidelines to assist the Judge in creating a world that makes economic sense. But the specifics of how you associate the rule with the game world are up to you.

Take the case of a 5% chance of an Alchemist being available This might be:

- 1) The Alchemist is a traveling peddler moving between 20 different villages, selling potions and lotions before moving on. So he very well might not be in the same village the next time.
- 2) The Alchemist lives in the village, but he's the only alchemist within the area. He's constantly busy. There's only a 5% chance the PCs can hire him each month - the other months, he's already working for someone else.

Swapping Henchmen

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/swapping-henchmen>

August 02, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Cameron wrote:

Two of my players are asking if they can swap henchmen.

I'm inclined to say yes, in this specific case, because the henchmen in question spend 80% of their working time with the opposite PC - really, the only defining trait of whose henchmen they are, is who signs the paycheck.

But I was curious if there was an official rule or guideline that I missed.

Within the context of the game world, the characters would each have to release the henchman from their service and then allow the other player to roll to recruit the new henchman.

From the meta-game point of view, you could simply allow the players (as compared to the player's characters) to swap control of the henchmen, leaving the in-game relationship intact.

How to Check Morale?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/how-check-morale>

July 23, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

I tried to search the forums, but the search application continues to be a bit flaky.

I was wondering how one checks morale. I know when, but for whom?

Do I roll for every monster? Each side? Each group or individual that gets its own initiative roll?

Thanks!

Great question. I wasn't as clear here as I ought to have been.

The intent is that you make one roll for the entire side, adding each creature's morale modifier and comparing the modified total to the Monster Morale table.

Here's the official rule, with certain text bolded to show you what was intended:

"The Judge usually makes morale rolls under two conditions: when one side of an encounter has lost a member due to death, or when half the group on one side is either killed or otherwise incapacitated. If both results occur in the same round, **one morale roll is made** at a -2 penalty. Solo monsters roll morale when they lose half their hit points. To make a morale roll, the Judge rolls 2d6, adding the morale rating of the **monsters**, along with any other adjustments he feels are reasonable, and consults the Monster Morale table. Retreat means that the **monsters** will make a full retreat (as explained under Defensive Movement) on their next action."

Here's a complex, interesting example:

The PCs encounter 8 goblins (ML -1) and 2 ogres (ML +2). The PCs swiftly kill 1 ogre. The goblin/ogre "side" has lost a member due to death, so a morale roll is required. The Judge rolls a 5. This means the remaining ogre (ML +2) has an adjusted die roll of 7, "Fight On", but the goblins (ML-1) have an adjusted die roll of 4, "fighting withdrawal". The goblins leave the battle on the next round.

The ogre now finds that half the group on its side is out of the fight, so it must make another morale roll. The roll is a 7, modified to a 9, "Advance and Pursue". The ogre gets even more aggressive.

The PCs now gang up on the ogre, which is effectively a solo monster. When it loses half its hit points, it will have to make another morale roll. This time the modified die roll is a 2. The ogre surrenders.

Henchmen Multiple Employers

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/henchmen-multiple-employers>

August 07, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

I understand that there are only 1d2 potential 0-level henchmen in a class VI market. My question is, if they turn down the dwarf, can the cleric try the same henchmen? And failing that, the mage? And so on in that manner until the henchmen are all hired or everybody has turned them off?

Or are they soured on the party (or perhaps just adventuring) as a whole?

jedavis then wrote:

We've been playing it such that in general each PC can attempt to hire a given hench until one succeeds or they all fail (unless someone gets the slander result, in which case perhaps not).

That is the correct way to do it!

Mercenaries, Bow Ranges, and Cleaving

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/mercenaries-bow-ranges-and-cleaving>

August 25, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Jard wrote:

I think that a few different systems have colluded in individual realism to create an unrealistic situation.

First, the crossbow has a longer effective range than a bow, longbow, or composite bow. At first I was stunned because no other versions of D&D I've played did this. I remembered ACKs is committed to realism so I looked it up and, sure enough, crossbows do a pretty good job of matching bow distance and have the added benefit of substantially more force behind the bolt.

Why then are they always characterized as the "easy weapon anyone can use?". Well, this is supposedly evened out in rate of fire. I have no experience with editions before 3e, but in 3e/pathfinder (and 4e to a lesser extent) it ends up that crossbows have difficulty capitalizing on iterative attacks or feats like rapid shot due to reloading not being a free action (move in 3e, minor in 4e). The longbows also get extra range, and the composite longbow even gets to do extra damage via strength. In ACKs, having a high rate of fire is represented by cleaving, in which composite bow had 4, regular bows 3, and crossbows/arbalests 2. Makes sense, only someone talented enough to utilize the higher rate of fire will have any benefit. As long as you're dealing in player characters the model works.

However, things break down a bit when you start hiring mercenaries. As expected, with Bowmen being historically harder to train, they are more expensive to hire than crossbowmen (longbowmen especially). Except these recruits are going to be mostly level 0s, level 1s at best if they're veterans. The end result is you pay more for mercenaries who don't have as much range as crossbowmen and are unable to capitalize on the increased cleave potentials.

I've got a low level player who's hired a couple bowmen and uses a bow himself. On a few occasions he's run up against the crossbow being the obviously better weapon, and I'd like to come up with some house rules that in at least some way brings the supposed benefits of bowmen and longbowmen to the mercenary level. Any advice is appreciated!

Hi Jard!

I think the bow has taken on a semi-mythical status in gaming because of the famous victories of British longbowmen, the mighty Mongols, and the Elven archer. But outside of these examples, the crossbow was a generally more feared weapon. Bows have existed for thousands of years, but crossbows were so scary that medieval lawmakers regularly tried to outlaw them. Pope Urban II banned them, as did the Magna Carta.

Being a bowmen required years of training and considerable arm strength. There was therefore always a limit on their numbers. Being a crossbowmen required little more than a crossbow and a bit of practice. Historically, crossbowmen were more common as mercenaries than bowmen. Bowmen were primarily employed by armies which used peasants or nomads who grew up with familiarity with bows - the English, the Mongols, the Scythians, etc.

If you want to give bowmen some additional love, you could allow them to add their STR bonus to their damage rolls. (Perhaps a flat +1 for mercs). Pulling an ancient or medieval bow required enormous strength. The effort was so great that it shows up in the skeletons of longbowmen, who show significant bone thickening in their right arms from years of bow-pulling.

Or you might consider a +1 to hit, to represent the difficulty of avoiding plunging fire.

Henchmen Magic Items?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/henchmen-magic-items>

September 08, 2012

Tag: Q&A

jedavis wrote:

So I'm rolling up henchmen for the party to hire, and I started to wonder if leveled henchmen have the usual 5% chance per level to have a magic item appropriate to their class that most NPCs do.

Currently I'm leaning towards no, since then they become a pretty nice magic item mine for the PCs, and it could be explained as "potential hired henchmen are down-on-their-luck, failed adventurers who either never found magic items, or who had them stolen." Thoughts from the assembled?

High-level henchmen do have a % chance to have magic items, yes.

From the point of view of mimesis of the game world (its self-consistency), a 4th level NPC fighter encountered and recruited in town ought to have the same likelihood of having magical items as a 4th level NPC fighter encountered and recruited in the wilderness.

However, let me caveat the above with a brief side point on the notion of "listening to the dice". James Mal and a few other pundits have waxed eloquently about the virtues of letting the dice stand, and building the campaign around their results. I am not a believer in "the dice are always right" when it comes to the mimetics of the world. That includes stocking your NPCs with equipment. Just because you rolled a "ring of 3 wishes" for a 1st level thief doesn't mean you have to listen to the dice.

The dice can be useful as guidelines and inspirations, but how you, as Judge, choose to stock the world in which the PCs will live must always trump them. So, for instance, if you decide that the *reason* the NPC is loitering in town is because he doesn't have any magical gear, then that's sufficient justification for him not to have any magical gear.

Hiring a High Level Caster

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/hiring-high-level-caster>

September 15, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

So, you want a 9th level mage/cleric to spend 2 weeks doing research to identify that shiny wand you just found.

You give them the 1000 gp for the ritual costs.

How much does their two weeks of time cost? What is the going rate for X level characters? Do you use the henchmen monthly fee divided by 2?

Hiring a mage to identify a magic item is effectively commissioning custom magic research. This would be handled as per the rules in ACKS, Chapter 10, Buying and Selling Magic Items, sub-section Commissioning Magic Items:

"The adventurer commissioning the item will be responsible up front for paying the base cost and the cost of any precious materials, and for providing any required special components. If the spellcaster successfully completes the item, the adventurer will then be charged an additional fee equal to 7,000gp per month, or twice the base cost, whichever is greater."

The fee of 7,000gp per month probably seems anomalous. It's the monthly cost to hire a 9th level character.

Since researching an item takes 1,000gp and 2 weeks (1/2 month) base, and requires no special components or precious materials, the cost would be $(1,000\text{gp}) + (7,000\text{gp}/2) = 4,500\text{gp}$.

Yes, I realize this is incredibly expensive. It's meant to be - the "magic item market" is intended to be very inefficient. It can cost as much to identify an item as it costs to make an item. As a result, many items are left unidentified, or only loosely IDed via trial and error.

Keep in mind that you, as Judge, control the extent to which an item has to be identified. For example, in the Auran Empire setting:

- Most wands and staffs bear runes that indicate that their command word
- Most potions have distinctive smells and textures that hint at their effects

Hireling 15% Minimum

<http://www.autarch.co/forum/hireling-15-minimum-0>

February 21, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

Tywyll wrote:

I've noticed that it's not really likely to have your full amount of retainers(assuming 18 cha)...or at least you will be paying them out of pocket since their minimum requirement is 105% of your share! Was this intended?

No, that's not what was intended.

Here's how it is intended to work. 4 adventurers, each with 2 henchmen, go on an adventure. They bring back 10,400gp.

The shares work out as follows:

$1x + .15x + .15x + 1x + .15x + .15x + 1x + .15x + .15x + 1x + .15x + .15x = 5.2x = 10,400$

$x = 10,400 / 5.2 = 2,000$. So a share (x) is worth 2,000gp. Each PC receives 1x, or 2,000gp. Each henchmen receives .15x, or 300gp.

Each of the henchman thus receives a share worth 15% of the employer's income. But the employer isn't going broke because of it. The idea is basically that for treasure purposes henchmen get a 15% share.

Sandboxing... There Must Be an Easier Way?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/sandboxing-there-must-be-and-easier-way>

December 11, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

Ok, so my players just recently bought (stole) a bunch of animals and supplies to go out into the scary desert. Now, because food, water, and weight are at such a premium, I made them track the weight on their animals, their own weight, all the gear, etc.

It took a long time and made us easily see why this stuff gets handwaved so often.

So, seriously, how could I have done it better? How could I have made it easier, or is the sort of book-keeping normal and par for the course for sandboxing?

What I have done when dealing with large groups in the past is to use the following system:

1. Calculate the group's total load from their adventuring equipment plus travel supplies.
2. Assume that the group is evenly distributing load in a smart and efficient way and divide total load by number of party members to work out average encumbrance. Use this to determine the group's wilderness movement rate.
3. Use the average value to know how much weight they can pick up or shed before changing movement rate.

This does create the possibility that a particularly laden fighter (say, in Plate Armor + Shield + Spear + Longbow) may have an average encumbrance that's lower than his actual total encumbrance. In most cases you can assume he's not wearing/carrying his cuirass all the time, sometimes riding on his horse, etc. If they have a surprise wilderness encounter, you can worry about it then, otherwise it won't come up.

EXAMPLE: A party of 10 characters goes on a wilderness expedition. Their adventuring gear works out to 60 stone total, for an average of 6 stone per PC. They have 1 weeks' food and drink each (7 stone each), bringing them up to 13 stone per PC. They will move at 30' per turn, or 6 miles per day. After 3 days, they've consumed 3 stone each, putting them at 10 stone each, increasing speed to 60' per turn, 12 miles per day.

If mounts are used:

1. Calculate the group's total load from their adventuring equipment plus travel supplies, including the mounts' supplies. Mounts use 4 stone per day in supplies in the desert.
2. Load up the mounts to half encumbrance first
3. Then divide the remaining weight among the adventurers up to 10 stone
4. Then divide the remaining weight among the mounts up to max encumbrance.
5. Then divide the remaining weight among the party.
6. The party's movement rate is the lesser of the mount's or the party's. It will usually be 60'.

EXAMPLE: The party of 10, above, brings 5 mules with them. Mounts use 4 stone of food and drink per day. 1 week of food and drink for adventurers and mount will weigh $(1\text{st/day} \times 7\text{ days} \times 10\text{ adventurers}) + (4\text{st/day} \times 7\text{ days} \times 5\text{ mules}) = 70 + 140 = 210\text{ stone}$. Add 60 stone for adventuring gear to get 270 stone.

Each mule can carry 20 stone or 40 stone loaded. So the 5 mules are initially assigned $(20 \times 5) 100\text{ stone}$ at light encumbrance. That leaves 170 stone. Therefore each adventurer is assigned to carry 10 stone. That leaves $(170 - 10 \times 10) 70\text{ stone}$. The 5 mules each carry $(70/5=14)$ 14 more stone, for a total of 34 each.

The party's movement rate is 60' per turn, or 12 miles per day, e.g. twice as fast as the party that didn't bring mules.

Tywyll then wrote:

*Interesting. Thanks for that Alex. How much food does a camel need (4*human I assume). Also how do you deal with riding animals? They got mounts in part to move faster than their tanking would normally allow. Would you count rider's weight against them?*

Yes. In honor of Car Wars (each human weighs 150lbs), I've always treated each rider as weighing 15 stone!

Note that historically, infantry and cavalry move at about the same rate across long distances in cases where the cavalry can't forage from the land, because the weight of supplies for the cavalry ends up being so heavy.

Guidance on XP for Mercenaries

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/guidance-xp-mercenaries>

January 17, 2013

Tag: Q&A

MichaelPfaff wrote:

So, what's the share of XP for mercenaries who battle alongside a PC during some overland hex crawling. Not a full-on battle, like in Domains at War XP rules, but say a group of 4 PCs being escorted through the Radically Darkwood by 10 cavalry.

They encounter some ogres and the cavalry helps, alongside the PCs, fight off the ogres.

What's the share of XP that goes to the mercs? Not sure if this is outlined in DaW or anything for smaller scale stuff.

I'm almost thinking something like a henchman share (50% share) divided equally among them.

But, any other thoughts?

Thanks!

Mike

Mercenaries only get XP from spoils (treasure). They generally would get a pro rata share based on the lesser of a half share or their wages (you can't give them 1,000gp just to level them up). They can advance past 1st level, it's just that it would take years and years of fighting. In an appendix to DAW I worked out what percentage of mercenaries would have advanced to 2nd and 3rd level. It's a small but real number.

You can allow them to advance as henchmen, but at that point hiring mercenaries becomes an easy way to circumvent the henchmen limits from CHA. If the number of mercs is within the permitted henchmen totals, though, then the mercenaries who are leveling up with an adventuring party probably ARE henchmen.

Jard then wrote:

Couldn't you theoretically advance mercenaries by only bringing a small number of them along to collect spoils? Say the 5,000gp was split among only 50 mercenaries of the same wage, they could all level up to 1.

Are these rules expected to work well for small mercenary parties or are they only intended to cover using mercenaries on a scale of 100s ?

I ask because my group has about a dozen mercenaries they bring along for overland travel, and I'm trying to figure out how to handle that.

The rules are intended to cover mercenaries organized in companies of 120+.

A group of a dozen mercenaries regularly accompanying the adventurers on wilderness expedition sounds like it should be handled as a group of henchmen to me. Each PC can have an average of 4 henchmen, so an average party of 4-6 adventurers could easily have 12 henchmen.

My rule of thumb is that when mercenaries have been with the PCs long enough that they have distinct names, equipment, and XP, they have probably become henchmen.

Jard then wrote:

I have been sort of ad-libbing the way mercenaries are done and slowly integrating rules you post from Domains At War whenever it seems relevant. Having missed the ACKs and PC kickstarters, I still don't have access to the DaW playtest rules and wait with bated breath for the DaW kickstarter.

It started out that they hired a few mercenaries to come with them while exploring the wilderness and to guard the entrance to a dungeon when they went in. I have forbidden any mercenaries from coming in with them. When they hire mercenaries, as best as we could infer from the core rulebook (which is fairly light on details about mercs), it seemed they have a fixed set of gear that they can't deviate from (giving a bowman a longbow doesn't make him a longbowman) and have no stats. I just assumed +0 to all attributes, so your typically hired mercenary is 11+ to hit AC0 and veterans, if assumed to be level 1 fighters, hit AC0 on 10+.

Initially we tried treating them like henchman for the purposes of XP, so they would get a 1/2 share of XP for any overland fights. At that time it wasn't clear when they would be expecting to get more than just their monthly wage as spoils, but there was very little treasure to be gotten overland. Regardless, a number of bowmen and a few light infantry helping to kite a skittering maw in this system resulted in a number of them gaining over 100XP and therefore leveling up. They did "henchify" one mercenary who survived a charge from a direwolf and therefore earned a name of "Wolfscar", but otherwise most mercs are nameless Bowman 1, Bowman 2, etc.

So far it hasn't broken the game apart too much because the players spend about 3/4ths of their time down in dungeons, but the mercenary rules have certainly created a lot of odd situations. Even if they were treated as henchman, wouldn't that make the regular henchmen less valuable? After all, mercenaries are available in somewhat larger quantities and come with a set of equipment already, unlike level 0 henchmen.

In the campaigns I have run, once the PCs begin to advance in level, they rarely hire 0th level or 1st level henchmen. Instead they are generally hiring 2nd-4th level henchmen. Having 0th level mercenaries become henchmen is therefore not really a benefit, per se - as those are henchmen slots which could be filled with higher level henchmen.

Jard then wrote:

That definitely makes sense. If things really break down I might propose putting an end to that.

Just out of curiosity, when you were writing everything up for mercenaries, did you have any specific uses for them in mind that were distinct from henchmen? Having only read the rules and having this be my first foray into "old school" play, I wasn't sure how to advise my players on when they would want to hire mercenaries vs. when they should hire henchmen.

What I mean is, a PC can look at the hireling availability table and say "Oh, when I need to identify a potion, I'll try to hire an alchemist. When I need to train an animal, I'll try to hire an animal handler." But when do they say "hmmmm, I'm going to need to hire a cataphract" or "perhaps I should hire some longbowman". Is it intended strictly for garrisoning a domain and the differences are largely cosmetic until Domains at War? Essentially, if you need 60gp worth of garrison, it doesn't matter if that's done by 1 cataphract or 2 longbowmen or 4 bowmen?

In writing the rules, my sense was that mercenaries would primarily be hired in these cases:

- 1) Guarding PC campsites, pack animals, and bases
- 3) Garrisoning strongholds
- 3) Protecting merchants on mercantile caravan routes
- 4) War!!

With regard to garrisons, yes, for 60gp worth of garrison it can be 1 heavy cavalry, 2 longbowmen, or 4 bowmen. This is perhaps slightly unrealistic but it works well. Certainly when you actually go to war, having a combined arms force that's been wisely built makes a huge difference...

Henchmen Risk/Reward, or: Why Would Anyone Do This?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/henchman-riskreward-or-why-would-anyone-do>

January 16, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Bascaria wrote:

I've run a few sessions of ACKS (more than 5, less than 10), and it is generally a load of fun and has been a huge hit with my group. I can't figure out how to handle henchmen, though, because I cannot, for the life of me, figure out why anybody would ever sign up to be a henchman.

The party consists of a mage, a thief, and a nightblade, mixed between 1st and 2nd level, so armored henchmen are practically a necessity to stand between them and the many sharp pointy things coming their way. But from a henchman's point of view, why would you agree to take all of the risk for only a 15% share of treasure?!

To make matters worse, the mage and the thief both have high charisma scores (+2 bonuses) and at least 1 proficiency giving them a further bonus on reaction rolls (2 in the mage's case), so I can't even reasonably have the henchmen demand higher pay, because the reaction to hiring/loyalty rolls are, worst case scenario, a 6--and there are lots of loyalty rolls; the rate of henchman turnover is horrific. So I guess, I'm wondering if we're doing something wrong, or if the world of ACKS is just full of poor saps willing to throw away their lives to protect brilliantly powerful wizard and his beautiful thief friend in exchange for a pittance?

—

On a semi-related note, the party has a lot of henchman. Between 3 players, they are fielding about 10 people at any given time. How have other groups handled that size when going into a dungeon? It's already causing some serious logistical problems when going down 10' corridors, and I can only expect it to grow worse with time. Is it expected that all the henchmen will go along with the party into the dungeon?

The party decided to leave about half their henchmen at the entrance of the dungeon to guard their bags for the last adventure, and it just happened to be the one time that a group of assassins was stalking the party, and the assassins took advantage of the opportunity to kill the henchmen and steal all the party's equipment, stranding them in the mountains, so it seems like the group is likely going to never leave anybody or anything up at the entrance ever again.

A few thoughts here:

1. Return on Risk: The likely income of a laborer or man-at-arms ranges from 1sp per day to 4sp per day. Cost of living at working class levels is about 3gp per month per person. One day's adventure could thus net him a month, a year, a lifetime's wages.
2. Adrenalin Junkie: Some people simply like adventurer. Consider base-jumpers or extreme mountaineers, a sport in which the best practitioners in the world regularly die, for no compensation at all.
3. Fantasy F**king Vietnam: Exposure to a horrific incident may leave the henchman too traumatized for normal life. "After my family got wiped out by orcs, I couldn't hold down the labor job anymore. I just wanted to shove a sword into the guts of those beasts. I needed a quest..."

Benefit of Followers?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/benefit-followers>

March 06, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Reynard wrote:

As a 10th-level Thief starting at the Conqueror tier, I found that my 7 automatic 1st-level followers were not nearly sufficient to my needs, and have been snatching up every available cutpurse, miscreant, and ne'er-do-well since. My recent hires already outnumber my 'free' followers considerably.

This made me wonder: Other than the fact that they appear automatically (and thus don't have to be hired and don't require Reaction Rolls), what benefit is there to followers gained via leveling vis-a-vis normal hirelings? Their inclusion at 9th level seems to imply that they're supposed to be 'special' or significant somehow, but I'm just not seeing it when 9th level characters command the amounts of money, prestige, and influence that they do and likely already employ numerous hirelings and henchmen. It's a rather minor bonus when one can simply hire people to fulfill the same roles.

Am I missing something?

Thomas Weigel then wrote:

It's not that they're special, per se, but getting started is harder without them. Without them:

- 1. Market class limits you to a smaller number.*
- 2. Reaction rolls cuts that down further.*
- 3. If your Judge is the right kind of rat bastard, you're time-crunched, which limits you further.*

In short, they make an excellent bootstrap, and since you get them early, you can start leveling them early as well, and may have some real proper henchmen well before you would without them.

And Ludanto then wrote:

Plus, and this is speculation, really, they seem like "not-quite-henchmen". They're often mentioned as equivalent with henchmen in things like the congregation rules. They have classes and a sense of loyalty unlike your typical hired goons. I feel like they're an almost end-run around the allowed number of henchmen. (Almost, because I don't think they can serve directly as vassals, for example).

Hi folks:

Thomas and Ludanto have answered the initial question as to why followers are valuable.

Reynard, you are correct that only henchmen can be vassals/underbosses. There is nothing preventing you from having one of your preferred followers be a henchman, though.

"It seems a bit strange that a character's vassals should be limited so sharply by his Charisma, or that a character at his henchman maximum would be, for example, unable to accept the surrender and pledge of fealty of a minor princeling."

The limit on the number of vassals being equal to the number of henchmen is a game mechanic designed to emulate the decentralized power structures that existed in most times and places historically.

Within the game world, political situations might arise that do not precisely mesh with the game mechanics. The best way to handle those situations is in the short term to do what seems logical within the game world and in the long term to assume that the game world will eventually adapt itself to the realities of the game mechanics.

For example, let's assume that Marcus has his maximum number of vassals (6). He now accepts the surrender of a subjugated baron, giving him seven vassals. Rather than say "you can't do that because that means you have too many vassals," the Judge allows Marcus to have a seventh vassal.

He then secretly makes reaction rolls for each of the six vassals. He notes down which vassal had the worst reaction; this vassal is outraged that Marcus did not assign the new baron as his sub-vassal, and as a result he becomes a traitor. In the next month, he only pays 75% of his taxes. The month following its 50% and he starts talking to adjacent lords about a possible change of fealty.

The maximum number of vassals rule is thus, really, the maximum number of vassals a PC can sustain while knowing that "the rules have his back", e.g. as long as he doesn't demand more duties than normal from his vassals, he can count on a measure of loyalty. But more than that and he's opening himself up to treachery, infighting, and drama.

(Think of it as similar to the situation where a Charm Person spell has worn off. If he's halfway intelligent, the formerly charmed victim is not likely to all-of-sudden reveal to his master that he's no longer charmed. It would require role-play to figure this out.)

0th Level Demi-humans

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/0th-level-demi-humans>

March 14, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Nerdnumber1 wrote:

Are there rules for 0th level "normal man" demi-humans? I just wondering if, say, a 0th level elf henchman got the normal elven special abilities. Also, what class do they get at 100xp (can't exactly go fighter, at least in the main book)? Is it just assumed that, by the time these long lived creatures get to adulthood, they have learned enough to get to 1st level (that throws off the demographics of heroism)? I'd assume normal demi-human mercenaries would have to be 0th level.

I'm sorry if this has already been addressed.

jedavis then wrote:

I kind of disagree with the "always at least 1HD" interpretation, on the basis of "adult noncombatants and young equal to 50% and 25% of the number of able-bodied adults respectively". I figure noncombatants would probably get the 4 general profs and 1d4 HP of L0 man, plus racial traits as appropriate, and level into a fightery class at 100XP. Likewise, if we look at the domain rules, we get "Families will be of the same race as the adventurer, e.g. elven fastnesses are settled by elven peasants" on page 127. So I think there's good reason for L0 elves and dwarves to exist, The monster listing entries for demi-humans are best compared to the bandit or berserker entries for men; these armed camps are hardly the only ways men exist in the campaign world, and so too with demi-humans.

But yeah, I'd level L0 dwarves into vaultguard definitely. Elves are harder, but keeping in the fighter motif, I'd probably aim them at spellswords... ? Magic is native to them, so they can pick it up where a L0 human wouldn't be able to (or some other fluff explanation similar).

Hey everybody! Lots of questions got raised in this thread. I'll try to parse them out.

1. 0th-level characters can advance in two ways, from adventuring or from campaign activities.
2. Under normal circumstances, 0th level characters do not advance into classes other than fighters from adventuring XP (ACKS p. 115). The reason for this is that all of the other classes presuppose some set of skills that might require either a particular background or a substantial amount of practice, and not just some real-life battle experience. In early playtests, we allowed 0th level characters to become any class they qualified for, and it stretched the suspension of disbelief that dockside laborers and peasants were suddenly becoming magicians, or clerics, etc., from helping to kill some orcs.

However the rules are written to allow for "extraordinary circumstances" when it would make sense to allow a 0th level character to become a mage, explorer, barbarian, or other class. For example, a Skysos youth rescued from a nomad's destroyed village certainly might become a 1st level barbarian or explorer. A young noblewoman with a beautiful voice who becomes an adventurer might become a bard. A peasant who levels up from a battle during which he saves the party by using a scroll of ward against magic might be allowed to advance to 1st level mage. Judges should use their wisdom and discretion in these matters.

3. Jedavis is spot on in his understanding of the dwarves and elves listed in the book; they are akin to the bandit or berserker entries for men - all of these creatures are 1st level characters (as indicated by their HD and Saving Throws), simply presented in a streamlined format for use as monsters.

The reason dwarves and elves of the sort normally encountered are basically 1st level characters has to do with the assumptions of the setting. Both races have much longer lifespans than men, with more time to train for war. Dwarves live in a state of constant warfare against the creatures that assail their vaults, while elves who are sedentary or weak are disinclined to risk their long lives by leaving their havens.

If it becomes relevant, brigands and berserkers can be considered 1st level fighters; dwarves can be considered 1st level vaultguards; and elves can be considered 1st level elven fighters (HD 2, Fighting 2, Elf 0) or perhaps rangers. In particular circumstances, the Judge could certainly have encounters with the rarer types of demi-humans, such as dwarven delvers or furies, or elven courtiers or spellswords.

4. Spellswords are "remarkable" (p.33) and serve as leaders of elven bands. The average elf would not advance to become a spellsword just from adventuring.

Increasing Carrying Capacity

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/increasing-carrying-capacity>

March 22, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Nerdnumber1 wrote:

Do items/effects that increase the amount you can carry (such as the Gauntlets of Ogre Power) effect what encumbrance level you are at (i.e. letting a fighter move at full speed in plate), or just your maximum carry capacity?

Thomas Weigel then wrote:

Strength in ACKS affects the maximum capacity (p. 48, second to last paragraph). Gauntlets of ogre power allow the character "to transport an extra 10 stone." Since it doesn't say, "...without encumbrance", I would assume that is just to the maximum. Giant strength doesn't say anything, but I would probably double all carry capacities for that one.

ACKS errs on the heroic farmer side of encumbrance, so the lack of any measurable difference between characters isn't really that big a deal. (It is a bit amusing that 23 stone is almost exactly the weight of the half-strength shield carry.)

Thomas's answer is, of course, correct.

Thomas, I didn't understand what you meant by "heroic farmer" encumbrance and "almost exactly the weight of the half-strength shield carry".

Thomas Weigel then wrote:

Heroic Farmer: You could also call it hardened soldier. Anything that lets an academic student of arcane forces haul 5 stone for an hour, take a ten minute break, and then be right back at it again. I grew up around farmers in East Texas, so when I think about the people who can do that, those are the sinewy, gritty, tough bastards I think of. ACKS pretty much assumes everyone can do that. It's no mean feat.

Shield Carry: I think it's usually called Farmer's Walk, now. The Hussafel Stone in Iceland was an event in the World's Strongest Man competition back in the early 90s—200 feet with a 341-pound (34-stone) rock—and got enough press that similar competitions rose up.

The "half-strength" stone (Hálfsterkur) was 228 lbs, or almost exactly 23 stone, which is the maximum an ACKS character can haul.

And MichaelPfaff then wrote:

I almost wished STR modified each category. For example, if you have a +1 modifier, you can carry up to 6 stone before dropping to 90/30 (instead of the normal 5 stone) and up to 8 stone before dropping to 60/20 and up to 11 stone before dropping to 30/10.

The only thing that reaching your encumbrance threshold does is reduce your movement rate. So allowing the STR adjustment to increase each threshold is to allow you to run faster, primarily run faster in armor.

If, e.g., an 18 STR gives you a +3 to carrying capacity at every level, then a fighter can wear plate armor and move 120' per round pretty easily. Since I wanted fighters to move slower in heavy armor than thieves in light armor, I explicitly didn't allow STR to adjust encumbrance. This makes magical armor (which doesn't penalize encumbrance) a very prized commodity.

If you allow STR to adjust encumbrance, you can very rapidly find yourself in a situation where strong characters move faster than high dex characters...

Revealing Henchmen Stats

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/revealing-henchman-stats>

May 03, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Ludanto wrote:

How does one handle this?

I swear that all of the 0-level humans that my players have hired have STR penalties. One beloved henchman (now a fighter with a spear) actually has a Strength of THREE! (He eventually took to one-handing the spear with Weapon Finesse, though.)

So, when hiring henchmen, do you reveal their stats up front? Hint at them generally? Surprise the players after the character is hired?

I suppose this is an area that is very open to Judge interpretation and it probably doesn't hurt either way, but I'm curious how others typically do this.

I reveal henchmen stats in the same way as I reveal magic items stats, e.g. when dice are rolled against them in play, or tasks using them come up in play.

Until then I try to role-play or narrate their effects.

Hire Reaction Penalty Duration and Mercenaries

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/hire-reaction-penalty-duration-and-mercenaries>

May 04, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

If my cleric bombs his reaction roll to hire a henchman, that henchman badmouths him to the town, and he gets a -1 on further reaction rolls in that town.

Is that forever? For the month?

If this happens several times in a row, do the penalties stack?

Also, when hiring a handful of Light Infantry, do you roll reaction rolls for each man, or do you hire them as a unit? The prices for Light Infantry seem pretty standard, and if you had to track every up-sale to every reluctant footman in a batch of 17, it seems like it would become unwieldy.

Thanks!

Ludanto -

- 1) It's for the month. If the PCs engage in particularly egregious behavior (constantly getting everyone they hire killed), though, feel free to extend the penalty in time and severity!
- 2) If it happens several times in a row (in the same month) it stacks.
- 3) It's contextual. If you're recruiting individuals then you'd roll individually. In most cases, though, mercenaries are recruited as groups, and so you'd roll for the group. We make this explicit in D@W.

Weapons and Shields

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/weapons-and-shields>

May 08, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Kiero wrote:

I'm still digesting the main book, but a few things leap out at me.

Missile Weapon ranges - to my mind, the ranges for the javelin and sling are too short. A javelin is a lighter spear designed for throwing, and much less robust if used in melee; presumably it also does less damage than a spear. The sling ranges are fine if we're assuming a stone, but should be longer (and more damaging) if done with a cast lead bullet.

So my little fixes: javelin range increases to 30'/60'/90'. Sling (bullet) to 50'/100'/200' - yes, longer than a shortbow at its longest range.

Given a javelin is aerodynamic, I'm wondering about extending it further still, but also making it only -2 penalty against Sunder attacks (they're even more fragile than spears and other polearms).

One other area I'd like some thoughts on is shields and cloaks. The Greek chlamys was able to be used as a shield in a pinch, by wrapping it around the shield arm. As it stands, there's no real distinction between types of shields, they're all just a flat +1AC. I'd like something a little more detailed, so that there's a reason to carry an aspis (large shield), for example, rather than a pelte (small shield). I'd like to distinguish melee and missile defense, and the impact on athletic-type checks.

Something like:

Cloak-wrapped forearm: +1 AC vs one-handed melee (?)

Small shield (pelte, buckler, etc): +1 AC vs melee

Medium shield (thureos, scutum): +1 AC vs melee and missiles, -1 penalty to athletic checks

Large shield (aspis): +1 AC vs melee, +2 AC vs missiles, -2 penalty to athletic checks

In a related point, when multiple troops with medium or larger shields are in formation, they can lock shields to gain an additional +1AC, but can only fight with short or stabbing weapons.

One last thing on cloaks, some were weighted at the bottom, making a useful improvised net. Would that be a +2 bonus to Knockdown attacks? I don't remember now if there's already a net entry on the weapons table.

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APM: Those are likely good changes for the time period you are focusing on. Javelins and slings abounded.

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APM: I think this is a quite reasonable house rule. You may want to review the D@W: Battles "Actions in Lieu of Attacking: Defend" rule. It provides for troops to form a shield wall / tortoise formation that provides +2 AC v. melee and thrown weapons and +4 AC v. bows.

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APM: There is a Net entry on the weapon's table, yes. Your approach sounds fine.

Kiero then wrote:

APM: Those are likely good changes for the time period you are focusing on. Javelins and slings abounded.

Cool.

APM: I think this is a quite reasonable house rule. You may want to review the D@W: Battles "Actions in Lieu of Attacking: Defend" rule. It provides for troops to form a shield wall/tortoise formation that provides +2 AC v. melee and thrown weapons and +4 AC v. bows.

I'm thinking perhaps a cloak-wrapped forearm should be +1 AC vs one melee opponent as a simpler way of doing it.

Hmmm, on the smaller, skirmish scale is that going to be too powerful? Obviously it still requires that you have lots of buddies who all have shields, but if there's already a rule I'd rather use it than make something up myself. Consistency is something I value.

APM: There is a Net entry on the weapon's table, yes. Your approach sounds fine. That's what I get for posting before I'd read the PDF properly! Given a net is already +2 on those maneuvers and I don't want a cloak to be as good as a purpose-designed object, I'll make it +1 to Wrestling and Knockdown with a weighted cloak.

That means using your cloak has some value, should you find yourself without shield and/or a weapon. A not altogether unlikely occurrence if you're not expecting an attack.

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APM: It certainly could be. The D@W rule assumes you have enough men in formation to be able to shield front, top, left, right, and behind. You need at least a depth of two men to make room for everyone to form the tortoise. So that's a minimum of 6 men. I think you could rule that if you form a shield wall with 6+ men, you can use the D@W benefit but less than that it's a reduced value.

Kiero then wrote:

I'm planning a historical game, which has no magic. But it's very much a game which will have loot and valuable stuff. Including valuable arms and armour, when manufactured by a master craftsman. While there are no "magic weapons" or "magic armour", I'd still like there to be a mechanical impact for exceptional gear, which will be very occasionally happened upon, and possibly commissioned.

There's a very helpful section in Chapter 9: Treasure which gave me the idea on what those impacts should be, the table for scavenged gear on p210. There are two better-than-normal qualities for weapons and armour (but not shields or ammunition), good and exceptional. Good items cost four times the listed price, have one special property and give +2 against Sunder maneuvers. Exceptional items cost ten times the listed price, have two properties, and give +4 against being Sundered.

The other mechanical impacts are as follows:

- *Good weapons: +1 initiative or +1 damage.*
- *Exceptional weapons: +1 to hit and with either +1 initiative or +1 damage.*
- *Good armour: Reduce Encumbrance by one stone.*
- *Exceptional armour: Reduce Encumbrance by one stone and +1AC.*

Are they worthwhile and expensive enough? Should the multiplier be even higher for armour? What should the impact be on manufacture itself (particularly if a craftsman PC wants to make their own)?

I had worked out something similar a while back, but I wanted the prices to flow naturally into the prices of magic items. I concluded that magic weapons had three powers - the bonus to hit, the bonus to damage, and the ability to hit magic creatures. I then noted that a magic sword was 500 times more expensive than a non-magic sword, so I decided this represent a cost of x^3 , where x is the base multiplier for one benefit.

This led me to conclude that (in your terms) a "good" weapon should cost ~ 8 times as much and an "excellent" weapon should cost ~ 64 times as much. There's a thread about this in the forums with more details.

In any event, there's no particular economics driving it other than the above, and in the absence of magic weapons at 500x base cost, your system is quite reasonable.

What Should the Impact Be of “Trained Oarsmen”?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/what-should-impact-be-trained-oarsmen>

July 23, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Kiero wrote:

Oared galleys are a big deal in my game, being historical and set in antiquity. One of the major distinctions in crews is between the untrained (often slaves chained to their benches) and trained (often either citizen-rowers like that of Athens or professional rowers hired for their talents). The latter are capable of much neater handling of the vessel, and are usually fitter, more motivated and better looked after.

To reflect the skill part, I've added a category to the Labour Proficiency, Labour (oarsman). We've got two NPC henchmen with the Proficiency, and one of those might be about to take Manual of Arms, which would mean they could train rowers.

So what does it do? You only really need one trained oarsman per oar (the guy on the end coordinating the others in a multi-rower-per-oar setup), so perhaps if you can get that many there's a boost to ship maneuverability and "sprint" speed? Perhaps a reduction in the likelihood of being sunk in bad weather too?

Thoughts?

I think the first thing you need to decide is whether the default stats for ships in ACKS represent trained or untrained oarsmen.

What you might do is have 3 classes of oarsmen:

Unskilled

Semi-Skilled

Skilled

Unskilled do not have Labour (oarsmen). They cost almost nothing but penalize the ship.

Semi-skilled have one rank of Labour (oarsmen). They cost the standard rate and work at default rate.

Skilled have one rank of Labour (oarsmen) and, say, one rank of Endurance. They cost more but can maintain speed for longer, etc.

Animals as Henchmen

<http://www.autarch.co/forum/animals-henchmen-0>

February 05, 2012

Tag: Q&A

MichaelPfaff wrote:

From Beast Friendship:

"He gains +2 to all reaction rolls when encountering normal animals, and can take animals as henchmen."

How does having an animal as a henchman work? Do they level up? What class are they? Etc. What is the difference between an animal as a henchman and just buying a war dog that's loyal? Also, on a similar note, how do you handle how many war dogs a character can lead around? How many is too many? Do war dogs go into dungeons? We had a player last session take 3 war dogs into a dungeon, and boy, those things are powerful. I allowed it in the dungeon because of the emphasis on training. I rolled normal morale and all that, but I wasn't really sure how to handle them overall.

Any advice?

1) Like any henchman, an animal henchman can level up through adventuring. Leveling would increase its HD. You can use the rules under Reincarnation spell or Transformations on pg252. It's 3,000xp + 500xp per special ability for a 1HD monster to advance to 2HD, doubling with each HD. For instance, a Panther (4HD) would require (3000x2x2x2) 24,000xp to get to 5HD. HD would be limited by the adventurer's own Level in most cases.

This allows the PC to develop legendary pets/sidekicks over time. If that is too fantastical for your particular campaign, of course, you can rule that animals can't advance in HD, or put a limit on their advancement in some manner.

2) A war dog, not being a henchman, would not be entitled to a share of XP and would not level up. Also, its morale would not benefit from the character's CHA bonus, if any.

3) There's no hard and fast rule on how many war dogs a character can lead around. As a rule of thumb, you could say that a character with Animal Training or related proficiency can handle the same number of animals as he can have Henchman (e.g. 4+CHA modifier). For each additional rank of Animal Training add 1 animal. If the character doesn't have Animal Training, he can only handle 1 animal, and it has to have been trained already.

Old Gumphrey then wrote:

So as the animals improve in HD, do they ever improve their AC and Damage? A 14th level wolf that inflicts 1d6 damage with no bonuses seems wrong to me, especially since he needs more XP to get there than a Fighter.

Jard then wrote:

On the upside, the 14th level wolf would hit on a 0+ instead of a 1+ like the 14th level fighter, and it would also have 5 more hit dice than the fighter.

Old Gumphrey then wrote:

So that's worth 24 million xp? I'm not sure if it is.

If you want animal henchmen to get more powerful with increase in HD, what I would recommend is looking at the scaling of a dragon's claw / claw / bite attacks, or the similar scaling you see in the various HD of bears and cats.

For example, let's say that AJAX is a war dog with 2+2 HD and one attack dealing 1d6 points of damage.

We note that black bears (4 HD) deal 1d6 damage with their bite, while grizzlies deal 1d8 damage at 5 HD, cave bears deal 1d10 damage at 6 HD, and polar bears deal 2d6 damage at 7 HD.

So you might allow Ajax the war dog's damage to increase similarly as his HD increase.

Agamon then wrote:

I'm raising this thread from the grave (think Pet Cemetery).

Anyhoo, another question about animal henchmen. Do they get a share of treasure? I can easily explain the monthly wage for upkeep, but what might an animal need 100's or 1000's of gp on top of that for?

As with all henchmen, animal henchmen count *as if* they got a 1/2 share of treasure for purposes of dividing XP. They do not need to be *actually* allocated a share of treasure by the party.

(True story: One of my gaming groups once actually came close to dissolving over a heated debate as to whether a player's War Dog henchman was deserving of a share of treasure.)

Movement of Demi-human Classes

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/movement-demi-human-classes>

July 18, 2013

Tag: Q&A

fahrgast wrote:

Do demi-human characters move at a rate of 120'/turn as humans do? Even gnomes?

If they do, I guess that the stats for dwarves in the Monsters chapter have the encumbrance into account.

After considerable soul-searching, I've concluded that dwarves and gnomes should have 120' movement rates.

Nowhere within ACKS or the Player's Companion do I specify that they have reduced movement rates, nor is their reduced movement rate reflected in the racial costs in any way.

In playtest, the slow movement rates of Thrassians is one of their chief disadvantages. Imposing this disadvantage unilaterally on dwarves and gnomes seems unfair.

The only argument in favor of a reduced movement rate is the legacy mechanics of D&D 3.5, and one line item in the dwarven monster entry. That's not enough to make this the right decision. I think I momentarily allowed my bias against short-people-races to obscure my thinking. ;)

Therefore the ACKS reprint will note dwarves as having a 90' movement rate in their chainmail-and-shield, e.g. the same as humans, and dwarven units in D@W will have the appropriate movement rates.

Judges can of course impose their own ruling here for their campaigns.

Battle Wagons

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/battle-wagons>

September 13, 2013

Tag: Q&A

SaruSama wrote:

I tried posting this in the ask forum but am not getting any replies so I was wondering if the community at large had any suggestions on our rules questions for this project.

So our adventuring party wants to create some battle wagons. However we cant seem to find the price/weight of some of the things we want. First we want to cover our wagons in armour. How much would it cost/weigh to cover a wagon in a wooden top with some murder holes to fire through and a reinforced door. Same question but with metal(iron?). We also wanted to have a ballista trailing each weapon. How much would it cost/weigh to set it up on a rotating fire platform? What proficiencies would we need to design this? Also do you need the siege engineering proficiency to man a ballista? And how much would a mercenary with this proficiency cost per month to hire?

Jard then wrote:

Your best bet is to use the dwarven machinist construct rules. it contains everything for handling AC, passengers, attacks, etc.

Here's a more robust example:

Assume you are designing a battle wagon with the intent that it carries 4 people, is armored with the passengers having access to murder holes, and has a ballista that it can fire on a rotating platform.

Ok, so first you must decide on HD. since carrying capacity is $(HD^2)*5$, 4HD is probably a good starting point, allowing it to carry 80 stone, probably just enough to hold all the people and their gear. This means this automaton has an AC of 2, and has an attack that may deal up to 12 damage per round

Next determine special abilities. By default, it has construct/undead immunities (+1), requires an operator (-1*), can carry a passenger (+1*), double passenger capacity twice (+2*), default move speed of 60' (0*), cannot move under it's own power since wagons are usually pulled by horses (-1*), cover for passengers (either +4 AC or use the automaton's AC) (+1*), ballista has a range of up to 10' per max point of damage, so 120', (+1*)*

Ok, so in total this thing is 4HD with 4 special abilities. This would require a dwarven machinist (or similar class you design with these class features) of at least level 2, it would cost 28,000gp to design and another 28,000gp to build, as well as access to a workshop worth at least what the automaton costs to create. in addition, the rolls to design/build the automatons would be increased by +5 (+1 for every 5,000gp in cost).

Now, if that sounds like quite a lot, keep in mind that (according to the rules) finding the blueprints or the broken remains of such a device can serve as a treasure from raiding a dwarven vault, negating half of the cost of creating such a thing. Also, this is effectively granting 4 passengers +4 AC, and one of them an attack for 1d12 (or 2d6 or 3d4, etc.) damage at a range of 120', quite a powerful addition.

Thomas Weigel then wrote:

An ACKS wagon can haul 640 stone, should weigh about 100 stone itself, and costs 200 gp.

Almost all of that weight and cost is going to be in the wheels, axles, and support: most wagons were just open-air crates, cheap as dirt, tacked onto the support and axles.

A wooden hut (ACKS, p. 127) is about 4x larger than you need to cover a wagon, so call it 10 gp before doors are added. Double cost and weight for a more solid, reinforced structure.

For doors and murder holes, use the (also on p. 127) reinforced door (10 gp) and window shutters (5 gp per window).

Approximate weight for all of that will be around 40-50 stone.

A metallic casing will cost about 100x as much, and weigh 200-250 stone. I can't imagine it would provide enough benefit to be worth it.

The ballista would be best served by the machinist rules, since historically, rotating turrets are a very recent invention, and also historically, ballista don't work unless they are very tightly secured.

How about a Heavy Chariot from Domains at War?

Chariot, Heavy: A heavy chariot is an open, two- or four-wheeled vehicle used in warfare. The cab is constructed from slates of hardwood and reinforced with bronze. The axle is set beneath the center of the cab, adding to strength of construction. The chariot's wheels are about 5' in diameter. Its wheel track is about 7' wide, while its total length is 15'. The cab measures 4'6" wide, 3'3" deep, and 3'9" high, with room for four man-sized creatures, one of whom must be the driver. The cab includes three built in weapon-cases, with room for a composite bow, 3 javelins, and 20 arrows. The armored cab provides its occupants with a +2 AC bonus against attacks to the front and flank. A heavy chariot has AC 2 and 2 shp.

A heavy chariot may be pulled by two, three, or four creatures whose normal loads add up to at least 80 stone. When used in war, heavy chariots are typically pulled by three medium horses or four light horses. The chariot can transport up to the harnessed creatures' combined normal load at 1/2 the harnessed creatures' movement rate, or up to the harnessed creature's combined maximum load at 1/4 the harnessed creatures' movement rate. The chariot may not exceed 90' per turn in any case. Heavy chariots can only move through deserts, forests, mountains, or swamps if a road is available. Historical examples include the Neo-Assyrian chariot, Chinese Anyang-type chariot, and Classical Indian chariot.

Cost: 240gp

Jard/Thomas, the problem with the Dwarven Machinist is that if you use the rules to make relatively innocuous items, they will end up being overly expensive. (Try making a shortbow as a Dwarven Machinist). This is partly aesthetic (playing off the trope of the needlessly-complex inventor) and partly a side-effect of mechanics designed to make sure that flying invulnerable self-propelled guns aren't too cheap.

I think if you took your current battle-wagon concept and then made it self-propelled, you'd have something that would certainly justify the egregious cost. It'd be a tank!

SaruSama then wrote:

Thanks for the reply Alex. I really like the heavy chariot, and it'll give us a great solution. We can run 2 or three of these around and just have them guard our regular wagon/offer places for the mage to hide :P.

I still have a couple questions on the ballista side though. Mainly is the siege engineering proficiency required to fire a ballista/what proficiency is required to run a ballista. Also How much would it cost to hire a mercenary with the siege engineering proficiency. I'm just bringing this up because my group got into a big argument over these particular questions.

1. In D@W we introduce the Artillerist military specialist. He costs 25gp per month.
2. You can fire a ballista without an artillerist, but you suffer a -4 penalty to hit.
3. One rank of Siege Engineering proficiency qualifies you as an artillerist.

Mortal Wound: Knee

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/mortal-wound-knee>

October 29, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Agamon wrote:

The dwarven vaultguard in the party took an unfortunate blow to the knee while fighting a mummy tonight. The Mortal Wounds table says, besides being unable to force march, his carrying capacity is reduced by 6 stone. How is this calculated?

$$\text{Max encumbrance} = 20 + \text{STR} - 6$$

or

$$\text{Current encumbrance} + 6 = \text{actual encumbrance}$$

The way it's worded makes it sound like the first is right, but that doesn't hamper movement much, it only limits what he can carry at a full load. The second is much more debilitating, but might be more in line with a wonky knee.

The mortal wounds description should be understood as reducing their maximum load. For an average character, this will reduce maximum load from 20 to 14.

I then reduce the load at each movement rate proportionately. Thus a human with an injured knee can move at 30' carrying up to 14 stones. He can move at 60' carrying 7 stones. He can move 90' carrying 5 stones. He can move 120' carrying 4 stones.

See also this rule in D@W: Campaigns:

Humanoids can endure heavier loads, relative to their own size. Humanoids may carry their normal load at full movement. They may carry up to half again of their normal load at three-quarters movement. They may carry up to twice their normal load at half movement. They may carry up to four times their normal load at one-quarter movement.

EXAMPLE: A cyclops can carry 90 stone at its full movement rate of 90' per turn. It can carry up to 135 stone at 67' per turn. It can carry up to 180 stone at 45' per turn. It can carry up to 360 stone at 22' per turn.

Note that technically this D@W rule should make all those of you who have wanted to have STR adjustment affect encumbrance at the 90' and 60' movement rates very happy... As if applied it yields the following:

STR 18: 23 stone 30' / 12 stone 60' / 9 stone 90' / 6 stone 120'

STR 16-17: 22 stone 30' / 11 stone 60' / 8 stone 90' / 6 stone 120'

STR 13-15: 21 stone 30' / 11 stone 60' / 8 stone 90' / 5 stone 120'

STR 9-12: 20 stone 30' / 10 stone 60' / 7 stone 90' / 5 stone 120'

Silvered Weapons

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/silvered-weapons>

November 07, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Asklepian wrote:

As last time, apologies if this has already been answered or is a common sense thing.

So, my group encountered their first wight randomly in a dungeon. It was... bad. Dumb luck on the encounter roll had it between them and their only known route to the exit, with a locked door and a dead end the only other ways to go. What followed may best be termed a slaughter. A full half of them were dead before everything was said and done, and it was only that restrained because I ruled fire would hurt it.

Understandably in the wake of that, the group is very interested in silvered weapons. That is when we ran into a speedbump, however. Only two silvered items are included in the equipment list: daggers and arrows. Now, it seemed to me this was just to make it clear that silvering something costs 10x the usual price.

There's some debate on the subject, however, and we're all so new to this playstyle that we're trying hard to stick with RAW. So, to state it clearly:

Are silvered weapons other than daggers and arrows possible, and if so how much do they cost?

Yes; 10x the price.

Goblin Henchmen

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/goblin-henchmen>

October 31, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Asklepian wrote:

I'm sorry if this question has been asked before, I searched around and couldn't find a duplicate.

So, we were delving into a dungeon, and ran into a pack of goblins. One of my characters is a Ruinguard, and his +2 when dealing with chaotic intelligent races pushed their reaction into Friendly territory. He negotiated with them to come work for him, and they accepted the offer.

All of this is fine, but here is where the questions come in.

- 1) I know the limit is 4+CHA mod on henchmen, but when does the limit kick in exactly? Should the extra goblins have refused to follow him right away? We had the whole group tag along for the time being, and the others depart on the way back to civilization, but I'm curious what the official ruling is for future reference.*
- 2) Experience for the goblins would accrue at the 3000 XP for the first HD, doubling thereafter, as on pg 252, right?*
- 3) If the goblins DID level, would each hit die be at a -1 like the first? Similar to how a con mod works?*
- 4) Last question, he's only level 1. Should they have refused to follow him altogether, because henchmen have to be of a lower level than you? The DM at the time made the call that they didn't instantly know what level I was, and if they eventually realize our relative strength, yes, it will become a problem.*

jedavis then wrote:

My suggestion in handling #1 is that I would assign the champion or subchieftain of the goblins as the direct henchman of the PC, and the rest of the goblins as subhenches of the primary henchgoblin. Not sure about the others. One might treat 1d8-1 as L0 for purposes of henching, since for example human mercenaries can have 1d6 or 1d8-1 or something as of Domains at War, yet remain level 0.

- 1) I know the limit is 4+CHA mod on henchmen, but when does the limit kick in exactly? Should the extra goblins have refused to follow him right away? We had the whole group tag along for the time being, and the others depart on the way back to civilization, but I'm curious what the official ruling is for future reference.*

jedavis has the correct advice for how to handle this. It's also worth keeping in mind that adventurers can hire mercenaries who are not henchmen. Such mercenaries would be perfectly willing to go on wilderness treks, carry treasure, garrison camp, etc. So it depends what tasks the goblins were being asked to do as to whether they'd even need to be henchmen.

2) Experience for the goblins would accrue at the 3000 XP for the first HD, doubling thereafter, as on pg 252, right?

Yes, that's correct.

3) If the goblins DID level, would each hit die be at a -1 like the first? Similar to how a con mod works?

It's never defined anywhere in the rules. I've been slowly writing up beastmen custom classes but I haven't come to goblins yet. For hobgoblins I treated the +1 as a one-time bonus, and I'll likely do the same for goblins (in reverse).

4) Last question, he's only level 1. Should they have refused to follow him altogether, because henchmen have to be of a lower level than you? The DM at the time made the call that they didn't instantly know what level I was, and if they eventually realize our relative strength, yes, it will become a problem.

The DM made the right call. Realizing they have greater relative strength would be cause for a Loyalty roll. But ACKS, unlike WOW or EQ, doesn't indicate what your relative strength is with a glowing colored name above your head. If you are Charismatic and well-equipped you might convincingly come off as higher level for a long time...

Hireling Availability and Cost Per Week

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/hireling-availability-and-cost-week>

November 22, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Nick Dalton wrote:

1. *Equipment availability runs on monthly cycles. What about hireling availability? Is it weekly? I'm guessing so since there is a cost per week.*

Example: I fail my roll to find an Alchemist in week one in a Class IV market. This cost me 1d6+3 gp. The next week I make my find roll. This costs me another 1d6+3.

2. *In the book example, the character finds 22 heavy infantry. They arrive over the course of three weeks. Does the player have to pay the finding fee of 1d8+5 gp (Class III market) each week it takes them all to arrive?*

1. Hireling availability is monthly.

2. Yes.

Encumbrance Question (Thrassians)

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/encumbrance-question-thrassians>

March 14, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Brandonshire wrote:

Ok, quick question here. I'm sure as usual I'm simply missing some sentence somewhere in the book that answers this but I can't seem to find it.

How exactly does encumbrance work for a class like the Thrassian Gladiator who already has a slower base movement rate than most other characters?

I have a Thrassian Gladiator character. His base movement is 60'. When he carries 6 stone worth of items what happens? Is he slowed down to the next lowest movement tier (30')? Or is he basically not effected by encumbrance until he is carrying over 10 stone? If he does drop down to the next level, which also happens to be the lowest level, what happens when he carries say 8 stone? Does he just continue to move at 30' until he's reached his maximum carrying limit?

This question is answered in Domains at War. Obviously you'd look in our mass combat system for your encumbrance answers! :D

I promise to fix some of these oddities if we ever do ACKS 2ed.

NORMAL LOAD

Some creatures are valued primarily for their ability to carry equipment, supplies, or treasure. The figure listed is the normal load the creature can carry in stone. Most creatures can carry a maximum of twice their normal load. When carrying more than their normal load, their movement rate is reduced to half.

EXAMPLE: A giant tiger beetle can carry its normal load of 250 stone at its full movement rate of 150' per turn. It can carry up to 500 stone at 75' per turn.

Humanoids can endure heavier loads, relative to their own size. Humanoids may carry their normal load at full movement. They may carry up to half again of their normal load at three-quarters movement. They may carry up to twice their normal load at half movement. They may carry up to four times their normal load at one-quarter movement.

EXAMPLE: A cyclops can carry 90 stone at its full movement rate of 90' per turn. It can carry up to 135 stone at 67' per turn. It can carry up to 180 stone at 45' per turn. It can carry up to 360 stone at 22' per turn.

Normal Loads

Bugbear 13
Centaur 42
Dwarf 5
Elf 5
Faerie, Pixie 1
Faerie, Sprite ½
Gnoll 10
Gnome 2
Goblin 3
Halfling 1
Human 5
Hobgoblin 7
Kobold 3
Lizardman 8
Merman 12
Minotaur 25
Morlock 5
Neanderthal 7
Nymph, Dryad 3
Nymph, Naiad 3
Ogre 40
Orc 7
Troglodyte 5

THEREFORE:

A lizardman (Thrassian) can carry up to 8 stone at 60' movement. They can carry 12 stone at 45' movement. They can carry up to 16 stone at 30' movement. They can carry up to 32 stone at 15' movement.

A creature's own natural armor does NOT count for its encumbrance.

Nets

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/nets>

March 17, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Gargarensis wrote:

Are there any further specifics on nets? Since the Auran Empire is similar to the Roman Empire, I was making a few gladiator classes and got to the retiarius, the guys that fight with nets and tridents.

Net

Range: ?

Entangle duration: ?

+2 on wrestle maneuver attempts.

-My assumption is that a character can accurately toss a net at least 10', and subject to penalties for tossing it further. Possibly replicating the weapon range progression of throwing axes and daggers.

-For the entangle duration my guess would be until the creature makes a Paralysis save.

This, or since entanglement is mentioned in the Web spell, the same rulings would be used. The equipment description for nets also mentions entanglement. Though a net shouldn't be a problem for a creature larger than a humanoid.

-I get the +2 on wrestling throws, but the way a retiarius fought is by entangling his foes in the net, and then proceeding to stab at them with their tridents. Also using the net to disarm his opponents.

-Also, for attack throws when using the net.

Will we get an attack bonus for using it since it is a weapon?

I figure that if you are tossing the net you would use the characters missile weapon attack bonus, and when trying to wrestle an opponent use the character's melee attack bonus.

Also, should a character attempting to toss a net simply use missile attack bonus, or also apply any penalties and bonuses for a wrestle maneuver, or even be able to toss the net at all?

Net:

"This is a round, weighted cast net designed to entangle and entrap opponents." (Equipment Description of net in Chapter 3: Equipment of ACKS)

Web Spell

"Entangled creatures can't move, but can break loose depending on their strength. Creatures of normal human strength or less will take 2d4 turns to break through the web. Strong humans (with ability scores 13-17) can break through the web in 1 turn. Creatures as strong as or stronger than ogres (18 Strength) can break free of a web in 4 rounds. Giants or creatures of similar great strength can break through the web in 2 rounds." (Web spell rulings in Chapter 5: Spells of ACKS)

Wrestle Maneuver

"To wrestle an opponent, a combatant must succeed on a melee attack throw with a -4 penalty. The opponent must then make a saving throw versus Paralysis... ..Other combatants are at +4 on attack throws against the held opponent, and thieves may backstab him. The held opponent may make another saving throw versus Paralysis each round to attempt to escape the hold." (Wrestle Maneuver rulings in Chapter 6: Adventures of ACKS)

-My assumption is that a character can accurately toss a net at least 10', and subject to penalties for tossing it further. Possibly replicating the weapon range progression of throwing axes and daggers.

APM: I do not have any historical data on the thrown range of nets. I've always treated them as melee weapons. Bolas allow for ranged wrestling and/or knockdown special maneuvers.

-For the entangle duration my guess would be until the creature makes a Paralysis save.

APM: The "entanglement" is handled as a Wrestling special maneuver. Therefore "The held opponent may make another saving throw versus Paralysis each round to attempt to escape the hold."

Though a net shouldn't be a problem for a creature larger than a humanoid.

APM: I would offer a saving throw of +4 for larger-than-man sized creatures (horses, ogres), and then additional +4 for each size category larger.

-I get the +2 on wrestling throws, but the way a retiarius fought is by entangling his foes in the net, and then proceeding to stab at them with their tridents.

APM: The retiarius would attack with the net using a Wrestling special maneuver. This attempt calls for an attack throw at -4 (Wrestling special maneuver) +2 (because it's a net), for a total penalty of -2. If the attack throw is successful, the retiarius's target must save v. Paralyzation. If the save fails, the target is now entangled by the net. At this time "other combatants are at +4 on attack throws against the held opponent". Since it's the net that is doing the entangling (and not an actual wrestling hold by the wrestler), the retiarius who originally used the net would count as an "other combatant". (That this MUST be the case can be seen by imagining the outcome of a net-trap or thrown net). Therefore the retiarius would get +4 to hit with his trident on targets he has entangled. It should simulate Roman retiarii tactics quite well!

Also using the net to disarm his opponents.

APM: If you feel the historical case for a +2 bonus to disarm is justified, please feel free to do so! Special maneuvers are underutilized in the game.

Also, for attack throws when using the net.

Will we get an attack bonus for using it since it is a weapon?

APM: You would attack using your character's melee or missile attack throws.

I figure that if you are tossing the net you would use the characters missile weapon attack bonus, and when trying to wrestle an opponent use the character's melee attack bonus.

APM: Correct.

Also, should a character attempting to toss a net simply use missile attack bonus, or also apply any penalties and bonuses for a wrestle maneuver, or even be able to toss the net at all?

APM: As noted above, I have generally treated it as a melee weapon, on the assumption it cannot be cast far. The bola, in contrast, allows a ranged special maneuver (knockdown or wrestle) but it doesn't provide the +2 bonus to the maneuver that the Net does.

If you wanted to have a weapon mid-way between, you might have a "throwing net" which has half the range of a bola, can be used to do Wrestling and Knockdown at range, and provides +1 to each.

Commissioning Question

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/commissioning-question>

November 04, 2013

Tag: **New Material**

jedavis wrote:

If a party in a class III market decides they really need 260 pints of military oil, how long does the production of said oil take? 260 days, 104 days (2.5 per day, since production of 5 gp per day and 2 gp per unit), or some other number? How much parallelism in production is possible when commissioning multiple items at once?

After some fairly complex number-crunching, I am now able to offer some clarified and updated mechanics on Commissioning Equipment.

COMMISSIONING EQUIPMENT

If equipment the adventurers desire to purchase is not available, they may commission it to be created. The advantage of commissioning equipment is that ten times more equipment can be commissioned than is available as inventory. Where the number available is listed as a percentage chance, multiply the percentage by 10 and divide by 100%. The integer quotient is the number of units available, and the remainder (if any) is the percentage chance of one additional unit being available.

EXAMPLE: Marcus is in Siadanos, a Class V town. He would like to commission the local smithing guild to create plate armor (60gp). There is a 25% percentage chance of one unit of plate armor being present in a Class V. Therefore Marcus can simultaneously commission $(250/100 = 2 \text{ remainder } 50)$ 2 suits of plate armor, with a 50% chance of a third. The Judge rolls 1d100 and gets a 32, so there are 3 suits of plate armor available.

The disadvantage of commissioning equipment is that it is not immediately available. Buildings and vehicles, which can be built by large groups, are constructed at a rate of 1 day per 500gp value. Animals take 1 day per 1gp value to find and train. Other equipment takes 1 day per 5gp value. All commissioned equipment is worked on simultaneously.

EXAMPLE: Since equipment takes 1 day per 5 gp to commission, it will take $(60 \text{ gp} / 5 \text{ gp})$ 12 days for the three suits of plate armor to be completed.

If you don't want to mess with the change in the core rules, you can simply rule that all commissioning is simultaneous. But the above will give you results that are more correct given the assumptions of the in-world economics.

Boomishtendency then wrote:

Sorry for the thread necromancy, but this seemed to contain the most recent commissioning call. If someone commissions something where most of the gold value is in the materials do we still use 5gp per day? For instance if someone commissioned a gold ring with a ruby inset would we include the gem's cost as part of the labor time?

I would not count the gem's cost, no, since the adventurer is providing it. The jeweler would instead be responsible for the added value.

So for example if the ruby is worth 500gp and the final piece of jewelry will be worth 600gp, use $(600\text{gp} - 500\text{gp}) = 100\text{gp}$.

I discuss the role of materials in commissioning in another thread but more-or-less if you provide the materials the time goes down.

Construction Crews

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/construction-crews>

July 06, 2014

Tag: Q&A

nDervish wrote:

D@W: Campaigns has a lot of good stuff about calculating how quickly construction projects can be completed based on the number and skills of people working on them, but, when there's a small population to draw from, how do you calculate the number of available civilians to put on the project? Any mercenaries, conscripts, and militia can obviously be assigned to the task, but it should also be possible to hire more help than just the military.

(As background, my players are currently running a one-hex mini-domain with a total of 104 families (29 peasant farmers, 75 in a just-completed village). They want to expand the stronghold and secure an additional hex to provide a little room to grow, but they're on an isolated and untamed island, so just pulling in workers from a larger population center would be non-trivial. Getting the assumed 3,000 workers to expand the stronghold at 500gp/day is looking pretty unlikely!)

Also, are agricultural improvements and urban improvements (to draw in more population) considered to be construction projects?

Between conscripts and militia, the ruler is able to tap into the able-bodied worker population of the realm - roughly 30% of the manpower.

If you would like, you could allow militia recruitment beyond 2 families per 10, with cumulative -1 domain morale penalties.

If you want to have "mercenary labor", treat them as being available at 2x the numbers of light infantry.

Agricultural and urban improvements can be treated as construction projects but they can also be simple cash investments, as you prefer. The system economy functions just fine either way.

High Cost of High Level Living

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/high-cost-high-level-living>

July 02, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

So my players are in the 7-9th level range and they keep hitting a problem.

They get back from an adventure flush with gold. But after spending a month+ identifying magic items, they are nearly out of cash thanks to monthly living expenses, hireling costs, and identification costs. Now it doesn't help that all of the mains bar one are casters, so it's not like they could leave them in town while they still adventured.

So what am I doing wrong, or is that normal? They are eager to start the domain game but don't have the money to do so.

For the record I am pretty lenient with magic arms and armor, or protection items...after a week of sparring with the items they will learn their plus (though no additional abilities).

I plan at some point to make a more explicit explanation of costs of living with prices for the domestic-and-sundry expenses of characters at each level of spending.

At low levels, cost of living is largely rent and food. At high levels, the greater part of the cost-of-living expense is assumed to be non-henchmen hirelings such as chamberlains, domestics, ladies-in-waiting, mercer, personal tailor, etc. - wealth is conspicuously consumed by having a large household. Imagine a merchant being carried around on a littler. So to the extent that your PCs are spending their wealth on hirelings you can count that against their cost of living.

Otherwise, without knowing the amount of money your party is spending on hirelings and the amount they are spending on identifying magic items, it's hard to know for sure what's going on.

In general, the more henchmen a character has, the more he is sharing treasure and so the less wealthy he will be relative to the number of adventures he has been on. IF the adventurer takes advantage of his plenitude of henchmen to tackle more dangerous (lucrative) adventures, then this will balance out, but if henchmen are used to "play it safe" then the character will be somewhat poorer. Less risk, less wealth.

Identifying magic items is a huge money-sink. Characters who pay to identify everything and never risk trial-and-error will have much less money. Characters who hang on to every magic item will also have much less money. Conversely, selling even a few miscellaneous magic items will fund a stronghold.

Hope that helps!

Tywyll then wrote:

Oh, another question, what constitutes 'common' magic items for purposes of magical engineering? I pretty much just treat it as the most plain of plain d&d items (+X gear, elven cloaks and boots, bags of holding, etc). Maybe I'm too harsh with that? Should it basically just be everything that isn't unique/intelligent/disguised?

It is left to your discretion because only the Judge knows what's common in his setting. My implied default is that a common magical item is anything that isn't unique, intelligent, or disguised.

Remember that Magical Engineering won't reveal command words, charges, or exact bonuses. So very often the process is:

1. Identify approximate nature of item. "It's a wand of detecting traps."
2. Decide if it's worth identifying for use. "Anybody want that?" "Nah..."

This discussion is why I felt that I needed to define further what cost of living expense entails!

Cost of living expense is similar to domain garrison expense in that it's a minimum you need to spend in order to avoid being penalized. I don't want to overcomplicate it, but if your players are grumbling...

It will generically include:

- Cost of food and drink
- Cost of housing
- Cost of routine clothing
- Cost of routine entertainment and gifts

The following in-game expenses can be applied against living expenses to a maximum of 50% of expense:

- Cost of renting a specific in-game location
- Cost of any number of artists, craftsmen, laborers, performers, or professionals, employed for personal and household use
- Cost of animal trainers employed for dogs and horses
- Cost of maintaining slaves for personal and household use
- Cost of stabling or feed for 1 warhorse per level of experience, for personal and household use
- Cost of stabling or feed for up to 6 hunting dogs per level of experience, for personal and household use

The following in-game expenses cannot be counted as living expenses:

- Cost of weapons and armor
- Cost of adventuring gear
- Cost of magic items, identification, and spells cast
- Cost of mercenaries and ruffians
- Cost of henchmen
- Cost of excessive spending applied as reserve xp

A 5th level patrician has a living expense of 450gp. He might spend it as follows:

Food, drink, entertainment, rent - 235gp

Maintaining a pleasure slave - 12gp

Maintaining 4 household slaves - 3gp each, 12gp total

Wages of a Kennel master (animal trainer - dog) - 25gp

Wages of a Stable master (animal trainer - horse) - 25gp

Wages of a Personal healer (healer rank 1) - 25gp

Wages of a Personal tailor (master craftsman) - 40gp

Stabling & feed for warhorse - 30gp

Stabling & feed for 6 hunting dogs - 6gp

Patron of a poet (master performer) - 40gp

Alchemists and Potions Without Spell Equivalents

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/alchemists-and-potions-without-spell-equivalents>

August 08, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Nerdnumber1 wrote:

I was looking through some old threads and stumbled onto this one again:

[quote=archon]You also asked: "I'm reading it right, only up to 3rd level spells (it says as a 5th level mage.) Is that correct?"

The default rule is: "In order to create a magic item, the spellcaster must know the spell(s) that replicate the magic item's effect, or must find a sample or formula of the item."

0th level alchemist specialists cannot know spells, so this raises the question of whether an alchemist can create a potion without a sample or formula. As suggested by the text "they can research new potions," the answer is that an alchemist CAN create potions without knowing a spell or having a formula or sample.

This is why it takes him twice the base time and cost that it would take a mage; he doesn't understand the underlying magic and instead has to tinker and experiment.[/quote]

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/alchemy>

And suddenly, it hit me. There's a reason some potions don't have spell equivalents and some potions for which spell versions might be over-powered. Alchemists don't need to make a spell first. Sure it's longer and costlier for them to make a potion, but there is no limit to the level of effect they can accomplish, save for their modest research roll of 12+. Sure some spells might have been lost to time, but I think alchemists may have played a part in developing certain potions.

A sufficiently-funded master alchemist, even one who is a mere level 0 man, can make 6th level equivalent potions, without a formula, on an 18+. This is a task normally reserved for level 11 mages who already possess the correct spell, requiring spell research if they do not. I'm figuring many a paranoid leader has chosen to pay for alchemists rather than relying completely on ultra-high-level mages who might have the power to usurp them.

koewn then wrote:

Ah! Thank you for that thread divination, that answers all my questions from the other one.

And it also completely changes my outlook on the proficiency and what game-world implications it should have.

I'm wondering if there's call to allow one to take the proficiency a 4th time, to be a Grand Master Alchemist, and raise the level to 7th - that'd give one the ability to do "Conventional" experimentation and thus require a Minor Mishap table for alchemy. Mishaps are fun.

Boomishtendency then wrote:

While this may be an over-technical reading I suggest that Alchemists might still be limited to level 3 spells or under. While a 0th level Alchemist cannot know any spells they still only create spells as a 5th level mage. This gives the benefit of the 12+ research roll automatically. However, I would also argue that by the same language the Alchemist cannot be expected to obtain results more advantageous than a level 5 mage could. Since a mage would only have access to third tier magic at 5th level, I think this is a plausible limiter on the potions manufactured by baseline alchemists. If one wants to be super strict about it, the potions without spell equivalents can possibly be priced out using the spell generator in the companion to see if they would qualify as higher than 3. My \$.02.

koewn then wrote:

I wouldn't think so either (above 3rd level effects). A 4th taking of the proficiency bumping the alchemist to 7th would allow for 4th, but without looking at the spell list or the PC I'm not sure how good of an idea that would be.

That would be the next step; plowing through the Player's Companion to see what all can be done for <= 30 points in the spell creation rules.

For example, you could get some interesting 'poison' sort of effects out of this - a Hold effect (from Death) lasting 1 turn, affecting one creature, with a range of 0 (because it has to be ingested) costs 30 exactly ($15 \times 1 \times 0.4 \times 5$).

Depending on how loose you are with multipliers, you can put someone to sleep permanently for a value as low as 11.

And there's a whole lot of interesting things in Transmogrification.

This is good. I like this. I've always liked the concept of Alchemy in a game; this is falling out to be very much like what I've wanted for a while, if all these statements are correct as far as rules intent.

As noted in the linked thread, alchemists are able to create potions as if they were 5th level mages. In lieu of having a repertoire of spells to draw on, they create potions at twice the base cost and time. If they have a formula or sample, they do so at half the base cost and time (as usual).

While the rules are not explicit that an alchemist would be limited to 3rd level spells when creating potions, I think that is an admirable rule which I will adopt myself.

In the Heroic Companion, I have added the following rules to Alchemy: "A spellcaster of 5th level or higher with Alchemy proficiency may add his Alchemy ranks to his Magic Research throws when brewing potions. If he has selected the proficiency three times, he can brew potions at half the usual base time and cost."

Grappling Hooks

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/grappling-hooks-0>

September 01, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Jard wrote:

The grappling hook entry reads:

Grappling Hook: These large hooks are made of sturdy iron and can be used for anchoring a rope. The hook may be thrown or attached manually by a climber. A successful attack throw is required to throw a grappling hook onto a target.

my questions are as follows:

1)what is the purpose of the successful attack throw? if this is out of combat, couldn't the grappler make repeated attack throws until they latch it? Is it strictly meant to be an in-combat rule, possibly a rule for when failing means making noise and alerting someone?

2)What's the range? I'd assume either a spear or throwing axe would be comparable, but then those ranges might be based on how close you need to be to do damage as opposed to just latching on, but it does require an attack throw so those might be the most accurate.

1) Even out of combat, sometimes the amount of time required to latch the grappling hook might matter. For instance, the adventurers might only have 30 seconds until the guard shift walks past.

2) I'd use hand axe.

High-Quality Weapons (and Tools)

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/high-quality-weapons-and-tools>

June 30, 2012

Tag: Q&A

CharlesDM wrote:

Hello,

Alex said in an old thread:

"In order to keep ACKS's prices somewhere similar to traditional D&D prices, I made the decision to assume that the equipment on the lists was good quality. The treasure section has information on low-quality weapons. For example, a knight's sword is 10gp. A peasant's sword is probably rusty, off-balance, and shoddily constructed, and therefore 4gp. Leather armor is 20gp, but a peasant's makeshift rattling leather armor is only 12gp."

First, let me say that I LOVE the information on low-quality weapons and armor.

As the subject indicates, I am interested in "reversing" the information on low-quality weapons to create high-quality weapons and armor (+1 to attack, damage OR initiative, OR resistant to sundering, OR reduced encumbrance, etc.) Once in a lifetime masterpieces might have two such qualities. (Like the tournament armor made for a young Henry VIII.)

I'd also like, for example, high-quality thieves' tools, navigational tools, maps, etc.

My question is, have any of the Autarch folks developed rules for pricing such items for their campaign? If so, could you share them here? (Or maybe even add a final half-page to the Player's Companion?)

Thank you very much!

Hmmm. Just thinking out loud here.

It costs 5,000gp to make a magic sword. A magic sword has +1 to hit, +1 to damage, +1 to its saving throws v. various effects, and the ability to hit magical monsters. Let's lump saving throw and ability to hit magical monsters into one power and call this three separate powers, "hitting" "harming" and "innate magic". Some quick math suggests that if we start with 10gp and multiply it by 8^3 we get approximately 5,000gp.

So from there, I'd say let each "power" increase the sword by x8. So a normal, good-quality sword is 10gp. A non-magical sword with +1 to hit is 80gp. A non-magical sword with +1 to hit and damage is 640gp.

For armor, the magic increases AC and decreases encumbrance. Some quick math similar to the above suggests that armor with a non-magical +1 to AC or -1 to encumbrance should cost 10x as much, and with both 100x as much. So non-magical plate mail with +1 AC (AC 7) but 6 encumbrance would cost (60x10) 600gp. Non-magical platemail with AC7 and 5 encumbrance would cost 6,000gp.

Chapter 4: Proficiencies

Healing Clarification

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/healing-clarification>

June 12, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Rodriquez wrote:

The healing proficiency mentions that: "In any one day a character can supervise three different patients, plus an additional one for each time Healing selected"

Does this only apply for the +1D3 overnight healing effect or also for neutralize poison, cure disease, cure light/serious ?

The rules say that "...if the character selects Healing twice, he can **neutralize poison, cure disease, or cure light wounds** with a proficiency throw of 18+, once per day per patient. If the character selects Healing three times, he can **neutralize poison, cure disease, or cure serious wounds** with a proficiency throw of 14+, once per day per patient." The key word here is "per patient." In order for the Healing proficiency to be used on a character, that character must be a patient of the healer. A healer can have three different patients, plus one for each time Healing is selected.

Beastman then wrote:

Can the healer apply all three effects per patient over the same night or does he have to choose one specific effect per patient?

Yes, the healer can apply all three effects per patient over the same night.

Tywyll then wrote:

While I can understand a healer being limited in the number of patients they can care for over the course of an evening, I'm confused by limiting the amount of people they can sew up in a day, especially since (as I understand it) the 'specials' from Healing only take a round to pull off. Since those are already limited by once per person per day, I've not found it unbalancing for the PC in my game (mostly because he can't roll over 14 to save his life...).

It's easy enough to house rule though. The beauty of the old school. :)

jedavis then wrote:

*That actually bring up an interesting question we've run into - how long *does* using one of the Healing specials take? I figured it for a turn, but what's the Word of Autarch?*

Hi guys!

It takes one round to use any of the Healing throws. This permits it to be used in combat situations and when grappling with mortal wounds. Obviously, one round is not a long time. The assumption is that there is after care which takes considerably more time, but which is incorporated into the "number of patients per day" ruling.

If a healer wanted to use his Healing throws on more than his number of patients per day, definitely allow it. ACKS is very simulationist and obviously a healer *can* see many patients per hour. But have the results be temporary (lasting perhaps 1 turn for a rank 1 healer, 3 turns for rank 2, and 1 hour for rank 3). This would represent not having bandages be changed, not being monitored for shock, blood loss not being monitored, etc. History is filled with warriors who have gotten patched up and then died later because they weren't monitored by the doctor.

For example, if a rank 3 healer successfully "cures serious wounds" on a wounded character, but then later goes on to treat a bunch of other patients, then the wounded character will lose the hit points he healed after 1 hour.

One way around this would be for each rank 3 healer to have several rank 2 and rank 1 healers with him that monitor the patients after he takes care of them. Those could be called "residents" and "nurses" and... Never mind.

Beast Friendship

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/beast-friendship>

July 08, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Rodriguez wrote:

How does a character with Beast Friendship "hire" animal companions? Is there a "Market Class" for woods and mountains? Is there a way to search for specific animals instead of rolling on encounter tables to find something?

Hi Rodriguez,

It's not intended that the proficiency gives access to markets for exotic animals, no. The number of characters with Beast Friendship is too low to justify the existence of a secondary market.

The adventurer may purchase domesticated animals such as dogs, cats, horses, and so on in town. Wild animals have to be encountered in the wilderness.

You could, of course, customize this for your campaign. Perhaps elven fastnesses offer exotic animals for sale.

jedavis then wrote:

Have a couple more questions (we have a player contemplating taking Beast Friendship):

Do animal henchmen have a similar loyalty / morale-type score to that of normal henchmen?

Likewise, how does 'hiring' a wild animal work? Is it just that positive reaction rolls with wild animals can result in them sticking around to be friendly longer?

Do animal henchmen have a similar loyalty / morale-type score to that of normal henchmen?

APM: Yes

Likewise, how does 'hiring' a wild animal work? Is it just that positive reaction rolls with wild animals can result in them sticking around to be friendly longer?

APM: Exactly. A positive reaction roll with a wild animal would normally just avoid violence and perhaps allow, e.g., a shared watering hole, or perhaps the opportunity to tame the creature through Animal Training. With Beast Friendship, the animal starts following the character around, lets him ride it, protects him when he's hurt. The creature will act like the character is his herd or pack leader, etc. The character is the "beast whisperer", more or less.

Identifying Magic Items

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/identifying-magic-items>

September 08, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

I'm a bit confused by exactly how magic items can and should be identified. I realize that a million years ago, this stuff was simple, but long have I grown fat and lazy on the use of the Identify and Analyze spells and now I just can't quite figure out how it works.

This is what the text says, "Sages and other characters proficient in Magical Engineering or Loremastery can identify common or famous magical items simply through their knowledge of such things. Potions may be identified by sipping them, or by consulting an alchemist. Otherwise, an arcane spellcaster of 9th level or greater can identify a magic item using Magic Research."

So, a character discovers a magic sword. They swing it around and notice it chops a bit better. Is that enough to tell them it is +1? Does Magical Engineering recognize the runes or whatnot on it to figure it out? "This is the ancient draconic script for 'pluswhun'."

Ditto with a suit of armor (though that is easier thanks to the weight...kind of gives it away)? Do you punch them a few times and figure out, huh, this hurts less than it ought to?

Ring of Protection?

Helm of Comprehend Languages? I mean, obviously if you put it on, you would figure it out eventually...but what if you wanted to ID it before you put it on?

Wand/Staff of Anything... how do you get the command word and charges if they aren't written on it? I assume Magical Engineering and Loremastery are not sufficient (unless that particular wand was used in some famous incident or something).

I know the book mentions that you can take them to a wizard to get them identified... how much does that cost and how long does it take?

My players are the type who have long since learned you never use/wear any item you don't get identified first, which is fine, but I would like some hard rules on how to do this, how long it takes, and how much it costs.

If I employ a sage at 500gp a month, does that include all the magic items I bring to him for identification? Or is it a single job? If a mage is hired to research it, how long and how much does it cost?

James S then wrote:

This is what I've told my players, specifically regarding a sword they found:

There is a Detect Magic Spell, but there is no 'Identify' spell.

If you believe it is magical, there are a few options:

** Trial and Error (a few swings will not be enough, you'll have to use it in combat and see if it 'makes a difference' (by which I mean - if it's the +6 sword of your dreams, you'll only be able to tell if you need a 16 to hit and you roll a normally modified roll of 10). This could take a while, as if you successfully land a blow *without* any magical bonuses, then it won't make any difference. Make sense?*

** Find a sage or other wise person with either Magical Engineering or Loremastery proficiencies. Loremastery will give you an idea of the History and Story of the item, but not *necessarily* what it can do (though it should provide an idea). Magical Engineering can tell you basically what it does, but less or none of the history around it. It also can't tell you if the item is cursed, tell you the exact +1's, number of charges, command words, etc..*

** Find a 9th+ level wizard who can do Magical Research to identify it for you. This will take a) money (1000gp) b) time (2 weeks) and c) a dice roll on the apt of the wizard. Oh, and D) a friendly wizard, of course.. :)*

A sage is fine if it's a 'common' magical item, but you'd need the Wizard to identify it if it's a rare or unique item. There is said to be a powerful wizard among the luminaries of the Imperial Expedition... but whether you can swing a visit is another matter entirely.

Of course, this all assumes it's magical ;)

As James noted:

**Loremastery can identify the general powers of a famous item*

**Magical Engineering can identify the general powers of a common item; it cannot reveal number of charges, magical bonus, or curses*

**A high-level mage can spend 2 weeks and 1,000gp to identify a magic item through magical research*

In addition:

*Alchemy can identify the type of potion

So a few designer's notes...

*One of the prevailing sentiments of many old-school players is their frustration with the mundanity of "just another +1 sword." Some of this perceived mundanity vanishes if you don't immediately tell the players that "it's a +1 sword". Keeping magic items mysterious for as long as possible is, IMO, a good thing.

*For magic weapons and armor specifically, I will identify the specific bonus of the item for the player when it makes the difference in an actual fight. For example, if the extra point means a hit instead of a miss, a kill instead of a wound, etc., then I reveal the plus. This has been a good balance point between "instant reveal" and "never reveal" in my experience.

*As I've said elsewhere, the high cost and time required to identify magic items serves as an obstacle to a trade in magic items by imposing very high transaction costs (the 1,000gp to research, on each side if they are paranoid). I feel a trade in magic items is largely undesirable for ACKS-like games: The magic items should be "out there", in the dungeon, not for sale at the bazaar. Also, the cost of identifying magic items is a valuable money sink.

It doesn't unbalance the game to identify items in other ways, per se, but it may have weird implications on the existence of the market for magic items.

Save vs Pit Trap

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/save-vs-pit-trap>

September 16, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

In the example traps pp. 240-241, I noticed that the two pit traps (camouflaged and spiked) have no save or other defense (like the "AC Save" of the arrow trap). I noticed it, but thought maybe that's just the way it was, but then I re-read the description of the Acrobatics proficiency, and it says that it grants a +2 to saves vs pit traps (among other things).

So now, with the two anomalies combined, I'm wondering if pit traps should grant a saving throw to avoid them (Blast & Breath, probably?)

Thanks.

I apologize. This is a case where the rules seem like they are more rigorously defined than they actually are.

The official rule for Acrobatics proficiency is "The character gains +2 to saving throws where agility would help avoid the situation." The phrase "such as tilting floors and pit traps" is intended to help the judge visualize what sort of situations those might be. But if the pit trap doesn't afford a saving throw in the first place, a +2 bonus won't matter.

The pit traps detailed on p.240-241 do not afford a saving throw, but have only a 2-in-6 chance of going off. If you invent a different type of pit trap that does afford a saving throw, Acrobatics would apply.

Acrobatics would likely also apply to:

Save v. Blast to avoid bricks from the ceiling

Save v. Blast to avoid portcullis falling suddenly downward

Save v. Blast to dodge a rolling rock

Save v. Blast to avoid a scything blade

Acrobatics: Tumbling Question

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/acrobatics-tumbling-question>

October 30, 2012

Tag: Q&A

cmarteta wrote:

1) From the text (p.57-58):

"....If successful, the character is behind his opponent. The opponent can now be attacked with a +2 bonus to the attack throw, and gains no benefit from his shield. Thieves and others eligible to backstab an opponent gain their usual +4 on the attack throw and bonus to damage...."

Now is this a very ambiguous way of saying "Thieves and others eligible to backstab an opponent do not gain this bonus...". or does it mean that a thief or other classes eligible to backstab who succeeds in the proficiency throw will get the +2 acrobatics bonus and their +4 backstab bonus?

They do not get both bonuses, no.

If you're a thief-type, you get +4 and backstab; otherwise you get +2.

Prestidigitation Question

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/prestidigitation-question>

December 07, 2012

Tag: Q&A

DrPete wrote:

Hi,

I noticed that this doesn't come up with any of the official classes, but what would happen if a character with thief skills took the prestidigitation proficiency? It may be mentioned in the rules, but it's not obvious. My first thought was that they would pick pockets as a thief of 1.5x their level, but I don't think that is right. I'm leaning toward either no stacking or +2, like the other thief skill proficiencies. Is there an official answer on this?

Great question! There's no official ruling.

If a Thief-type wanted to use Prestidigitation to pick pockets "hands free," I'd allow them to do at their standard target value for a Thief. That would make for a very powerful pickpocket, as he could essentially steal without needing to approach or bump into his "mark".

If a Thief-type was willing to use both his hands and his magic, I'd give them +2 on their roll.

Alchemy

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/alchemy>

December 14, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Adam Meyers wrote:

I'm sure this is just an oversight and the intention is 'yes they can', but can alchemists and characters with the alchemist proficiency create magic potions? As written, the proficiency and the specialist state they can assist a mage in creating potions, and they can RESEARCH magic potions, but it doesn't actually say anywhere that Alchemists can create potions.

Just curious. I'm designing an engineer class and alchemy was going to be a big part of it.

Here are the relevant rules.

Alchemy Proficiency: If the character takes this proficiency twice, he can work as an alchemical assistant. If the character takes this proficiency three times, he is an alchemist himself, as described under Hiring Specialists.

Alchemist: Alchemists are valuable specialists because they dedicate their expertise to creating potions and other concoctions. They may work as assistants to mages to help them create potions. They may also research new potions as if they were 5th level mages, but at twice the base time and cost.

Assistants: 0th level characters with two ranks in Alchemy may function as assistants in the creation of potions...The assistant must have a formula or sample to work from.

In summary:

With 2 ranks of Alchemy, you are restricted to working as an assistant. You must have a formula or sample to work from.

With 3 ranks of Alchemy, you may either work as an assistant, OR you may work independently. When working independently, you work as if a 5th level mage, but at twice the base time and cost.

There is one area of the rules that's unclear, which is this: "The assistant's chance of successfully creating the item is based on the assistant's level." So what level is a 0th level Alchemist assistant?

The answer:

With 2 ranks of Alchemy, the character assists as a 0th level character (magic research throw 18+)

With 3 ranks of Alchemy, the character assists as a 5th level character (magic research throw 12+)

You also asked: "I'm reading it right, only up to 3rd level spells (it says as a 5th level mage.) Is that correct?"

The default rule is: "In order to create a magic item, the spellcaster must know the spell(s) that replicate the magic item's effect, or must find a sample or formula of the item."

0th level alchemist specialists cannot know spells, so this raises the question of whether an alchemist can create a potion without a sample or formula. As suggested by the text "they can research new potions," the answer is that an alchemist CAN create potions without knowing a spell or having a formula or sample.

This is why it takes him twice the base time and cost that it would take a mage; he doesn't understand the underlying magic and instead has to tinker and experiment.

Training Times for Manual of Arms

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/training-times-manual-arms>

December 11, 2012

Cameron wrote:

One of my players wants to establish a training school for skirmishers (unarmored and carrying shield and a few javelins to minimize encumbrance, with the Running proficiency) who can throw a decent distance and then move (quickly!) behind the heavier-armored troops.

It appeals to me, and I'd like to be fair to the player, but I can't figure out how the training times were arrived at.

I think one slot of Manual of Arms is sufficient, with a requirement of the Running proficiency, and it seems like they should be somewhere near slingers (for the ranged output) but other than that ...

Was there any kind of formula to the training times? Is it based on a historical source I can go to? Is it just by feel?

The "official" method is:

1 month training time for melee troops or crossbowmen.

2 month training time for slingers, short bowmen, or composite bowmen.

3 month training time for longbowmen.

Multiply time by 3 to fight on light warhorses.

Multiply time by 6 to fight on medium or heavy warhorses.

Thus a composite bowmen (2 months) on a light warhorse (x3) takes 6 months.

Composite bows are not harder to use than self bows, but they are much more expensive to field. Longbows are much less expensive than composite bows, but are harder to use, as they require substantially greater strength.

On a related note, this data from Domains at War may be helpful:

Once levied, conscripts can be trained to become professional troops in the same varieties as exist for mercenaries (e.g. light infantry, horse archers, etc.). However, not every conscript can qualify to become every type of troop. Some lack any talent with animals, and cannot become cavalry; others are nearsighted and cannot become archers, for instance.

Any peasant able-bodied enough to be conscripted in the first place can be trained to be light infantry. 50% of conscripts have the strength and stamina to be heavy infantry. 50% have the agility and vision to be slingers, bowmen or crossbowmen. Up to 25% have the skill and seat to be light cavalry and only two-thirds of those (17% of the total) to be medium cavalry. Longbowmen must be drawn from those with the strength of heavy infantry and vision of bowmen, so only 25% of conscripts can qualify. Horse archers must be drawn from those capable of being both bowmen and cavalry, so only 12% can qualify. Heavy cavalry must be drawn from those capable of being both heavy infantry and medium cavalry, so only 8.5% can qualify. Cataphract cavalry must be drawn from those capable of being heavy infantry, bowmen, and medium cavalry, so only 5% can qualify.

Qualifying Number of Conscripts					
	Qualifying Number (Per 100 Conscripts)				
Troop Type	Man	Dwarf	Elf	Goblin	Orc
Light Infantry	100	-	100	100	100
Slingers	50	-	-	50	-
Heavy Infantry	50	100	50	-	75
Crossbowman	50	50	-	-	50
Mounted Crossbowman	-	12	-	-	-
Bowman	50	-	100	50	50
Longbowman	25	-	50	-	-
Light Cavalry	25	-	50	-	-
Horse Archers	12	-	25	-	-
Medium Cavalry	17	-	-	-	-
Heavy Cavalry	9	-	-	-	-
Cataphract Cavalry	5				
Wolf Riders	-	-	-	5	-

Mercenary Veterans

Most mercenary units try to avoid actual warfare, preferring to be deployed to patrols, garrisons, and punitive expeditions against peasants. After all, real fighting leads to real dying, and dead mercenaries collect no wages! As a result, the average human mercenary is a 0th level normal man (1-1 HD, attack throw 11+, damage by weapon).

Mercenary units with experience of real war are known as veterans. Veterans will generally be 1st level fighters or explorers. They will have morale scores 1 point higher than the base morale for their troop type. If recruited into a leader's army, veterans must be paid twice the wages of normal troops of their type. Up to 25% of human mercenaries hired (e.g. 100 out of every 400) may be veterans. (Being 1 HD creatures, elven and dwarven mercenaries are already equivalent to veterans.)

According to the Domains at War rules-as-written (which are, to be fair, still in beta!), there's no way to "train up" to elite status. You have to get there via XP. Here are the applicable rules:

0th Level Characters and Experience from Adventuring

A 0th level character who participates in an adventure will earn experience points. When a 0th level character earns 100 XP from adventuring, he advances to become a 1st level fighter. The character gains the fighter class proficiency, powers, attack throws, and saving throws. The character re-rolls his hit points using his new class's Hit Die (1d8), keeping either his new hp total or his prior hp total if it was higher. The new 1st level character retains any general proficiencies he already knew. When he advances to 2nd, 3rd, and 4th level, he must remove one of these pre-existing general proficiencies, representing the erosion of his old professional skills over time. When he reaches 4th level, he acquires the Adventuring proficiency. Under normal circumstances, 0th level characters do not advance into classes other than fighters from adventuring XP.

Experience Points from Spoils:

Each participant (whether a commander, a hero, or a creature in a unit) earns 1 XP for each gold piece he collects from the spoils of war. Troops will expect that at least 50% of any spoils captured will be shared on a pro rata basis in relation to their wages. If this does not occur, the Judge should make a morale roll for any unpaid troops.

EXAMPLE: An army consisting of 8 units of 100 heavy infantry and 8 units of 25 heavy cavalry, led by 9th level fighter, has gathered battle loot worth 10,000gp. The leader claims half (5,000gp) for himself and shares the rest of the loot among the men on a pro rata basis in relation to their wages, so that heavy infantry get 3gp each and heavy cavalry get 13gp each. The General earns 5,000XP, each heavy infantryman receives 3 XP and each heavy cavalryman receives 13XP.

What's the Deal with Dwarven Brewing?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/whats-deal-dwarven-brewing>

January 29, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Jard wrote:

What's the deal with Dwarven Brewing? it gives +4 to craft alcoholic beverages, but Craft (which includes crafting alcohol) doesn't involve a proficiency throw. One of my players just rolled a dwarven craftpriest and got the Sacramentalist template, he liked the sound of it but now we're not sure what the interaction (if any) between Alchemy, Dwarven Brewing, and Craft (brewing) is, if any.

I apologize for your confusion. It's sloppiness on my part.

Craft: A character with Craft can identify masterwork items, rare materials, and famous artisans with a proficiency throw of 11+.

Dwarven Brewing: The character knows the secrets of the famed beer and ale of the dwarves. Because of his familiarity with mixology, he may make a proficiency throw of 11+ to determine the magical properties of a potion or oil on taste. He gains a +4 bonus to proficiency throws to craft alcoholic beverages.

The description probably makes more sense if you read it as Craft (alcoholic beverages).

So the inter-play is as follows:

* The Dwarven Brewer can determine the magical properties of a potion or oil on taste. While this entails some risk, the Dwarven Brewer is not limited to "common" potions in the way that an Alchemist is. "Mmmm, this is a rare potion of skinchange..."

* A character could attempt to use both Alchemy and Dwarven Brewing to identify a potion, getting two rolls in place of one. This is mathematically virtually equivalent to a second rank of Alchemy (2 x 50% chance of success = 75% chance of success; 1 x 70% chance of success).

* A character with Dwarven Brewing gets +4 to Craft (alcoholic beverages) proficiency throws. This, again, is virtually equivalent to a second rank of Craft.

Asaris then wrote:

So, for example, he would get a +4 to determine that a beer found in a dungeon was from the famous brewing hall "Putsch"?

Hilariously so, yes.

Knowledge (Monsters)?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/knowledge-monsters>

May 24, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Slippery_Chicken wrote:

How does one determine what a character knows "in character" about the special abilities and weaknesses a monster has? Does he need to make a special proficiency throw? Is it assumed that everyone can simply identify a Cockatrice on sight?

Should he have to take a Knowledge proficiency to be aware of monster abilities? If so, how would you adjudicate it?

If players are expected to metagame this information (using player knowledge instead of character knowledge), then leafing through the monsters section is no problem for me, but I'm looking for a more elegant solution.

Slippery Chicken, the way I handle this is to assume that characters possess whatever meta-game knowledge they happen to possess by virtue of Adventuring proficiency.

HOWEVER, in conjunction with this rule, I also rule that characters relying on "Adventuring proficiency" will not be alerted to possible alternatives that might exist within the setting, or be told if they are wrong. Whereas Characters with appropriate Knowledge proficiencies can *confirm* that their meta-game knowledge is true in-game. As Judge, I like to tweak monsters a bit here and there to keep the players constantly guessing.

Examples:

1. The PCs see a large, metallic bull in a courtyard filled with statues. "It's a Gorgon," warns Marcus. The player knew this because he's read about Gorgons in the 1e Monster Manual, while Marcus knew this because he has Adventuring proficiency.
2. The PCs encounter a holy symbol of a serpent eating its own tail. "That's a holy symbol of Iskara, a Chthonic goddess", says Marcus. The player knows this because he played a Cleric in my last campaign. Marcus knows this because he has Adventuring proficiency. Then I ask Balbus, an actual Cleric, to make a Theology proficiency throw. He succeeds. I say "Balbus knows this is true. He also knows that the serpent-eating-its-own-tail represents Iskara in her incarnation as the Destroyer, an apocalyptic avatar."

3. The PCs encounter a black gooey mass in a dungeon corridor. Marcus says "It's black pudding! It's immune to fire, hit it with lightning!" This is actually wrong, of course. The player "knows" this from reading the ACKS book (but is forgetting the actual rule) while the character "knows" this from Adventuring proficiency. A player controlling Grimm, a Dwarven Delver, thinks Marcus is wrong, but can't quite remember. Grimm has Naturalism (subterranean terrain) so the player says "That doesn't sound right... Judge, can I roll against Naturalism?" The Judge nods, and he rolls. His roll succeeds. "Grimm thinks that if this IS a black pudding, fire will kill it, while lightning will make it split up into more puddings."

Proficiencies

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/proficiencies>

May 24, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Machpants wrote:

Reading through ACKS, the first thing that struck me as odd (after the divine spell progression, having started D&D with BECMI rather than B/X!) is that class get different rates of proficiencies. I find it very odd that as you progress in your class some classes get better at stuff relevant to their class than others. Specifically weird are Mages, who study a lot, get the least proficiencies. So I decided to do class and general at the same rate for every class.

Further thinking made me decide to disconnect proficiencies from level and just do it as experience points. This also means that demi-human classes still get something (a little like the post level grades in BECMI) after they top out in level. So, based on the Fighter progression, I intend to use:

A character gets a General Proficiency at:

0 XP (starting) + Int bonus

16,000XP

250,000 XP

730,000 XP

and every 500,000XP from then on.

A character gets a Class Proficiency at

0 XP (starting)

4,000 XP

32,000 XP

250,000 XP

610,000 XP

and every 360,000 XP from then on.

What do you think?

There are good reasons for the rule.

1. Fighters tend not to get many bonus proficiencies from INT. Ensuring they get a steady supply of class proficiencies helps make sure they have enough proficiency slots to take proficiencies for the end-game, like Command and Military Strategy, if they want.

2. Fighters get more proficiencies than other classes because they have historically been underpowered over the mid to end game relative to Mages. ACKS tackles this in several ways. One of them is through cleaving, another is the fighter damage bonus, and the last is increasing proficiencies.

3. The fact that Fighters get more proficiencies isn't intended to say that Mages aren't more learned, but rather that what Mages have to spend their time learning (spells) isn't the same as learning day to day skills or specialties.

4. By restricting Mage's class proficiencies, it makes the INT bonus more important, which is a subtle benefit to being smart.

5. A generous selection of proficiencies allows Fighters to have a tad more customization, which is arguably more needed than for the more intrinsically choice-laden spellcasters.

#3, #4, and #5 are not incredibly important, but #1 and #2 are relatively important. If you equalize proficiencies for all classes, I'd recommend giving Fighter-types a bonus proficiency somewhere along the line.

Running Proficiency

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/running-proficiency>

May 21, 2013

Tag: Q&A

MichaelPfaff wrote:

"Running: The character's base movement speed is increased by 30' when wearing chainmail or lighter armor."

What does "base movement" refer to? Exploration movement? Normal running movement?

Does this proficiency impact speed in all situations? Or, only when actually running? What about charging?

Thanks!

Base movement speed is 120' per turn when exploring, or 120' per round running. Running proficiency increases your speed to 150' per turn when exploring or 150' per round running. Combat move is 1/3 running speed, so it would be 50' per round.

Familiar Fighting

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/familiar-fighting>

July 05, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

LibraryLass wrote:

How well do familiars fight? What are their AC, attack bonus, saves, etcetera?

Slippery_Chicken then wrote:

[Not an Autarch]

I think Familiar would be classified as a monster, and attack as a monster of its hit dice (as the table on Core page 102).

No idea about the other stuff.

Correct. Familiars are classified as monsters and attack as monsters of their HD.

Can Familiars Have Familiars?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/can-familiars-have-familiars>

July 20, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Strategos wrote:

According to ACKS Core, familiars have access to general proficiencies, and they have the same number of proficiencies that their masters do. This means that, by the rules, familiars are able to take the Familiar proficiency. Does this recursive string of familiars having familiars that have familiars that...etc. end at some point, or are there entire nations in the Auran Empire that are just filled with familiars?

I feel very late to this party. The rules-as-written would allow it. As a Judge, I'd probably give the player a very dirty look and disallow it, unless he had something very clever in mind.

Are These Feats from Blood and Treasure Usable as Proficiencies?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/are-these-feats-blood-and-treasure-usable-proficiencies>

August 13, 2013

Tag: Q&A

LibraryLass wrote:

Okay, so I cheated on Autarch recently-- sorry, boys-- and bought Blood and Treasure on some trusted recommendations. Now there were bits of it I liked and bits of it I didn't (Mainly, the 3.5-isms like huge spell and monster lists, and Bards, Rangers, and Assassins casting spells). One of the parts I really liked was its feats. Trim but robust, if I didn't like the Proficiencies in ACKS it might be my go-to in the future.

My question is this: How viable would it be to turn a couple of the feats in it, which I thought were an interestingly simplified take on the idea, into special proficiencies for characters capable of casting spells in ACKS (and one as a general proficiency)?

For those of you that don't have B&T, here are the feats I'm interested in porting over reproduced (Most of the book is Open Game Content, and even if it weren't I think this qualifies as fair use):

Empower Spell: You can cast one spell per day with all of its variables doubled (i.e. instead of 1d6 points of damage, it deals 2d6 points of damage, or instead of the effect lasting 1d4 rounds, it lasts 2d4 rounds.

Enlarge Spell: You may double the range of one spell that you cast each day.

Extend Spell: You can cast one spell per day with double the normal duration.

Silent Spell: You can cast one spell per day without vocalizing it.

Still Spell: You can cast one spell per day without moving your hands.

Widen Spell: Once per day, you can double the area of effect of a spell.

This last one is the one I was thinking of as a general proficiency.

Magical Aptitude: You learn to cast a single 0-level magic-user spell once per day. You may choose this feat more than once, applying it to a different 0-level spell each time. Any character can take this feat, even magic-users. (Note: I'd probably have to make this first-level spells, of course, since ACKS doesn't normally use cantrips)

Would this mess up balance terribly, require too much translation, or even just be stupid?

No worries about your "adultery", LL ;) Blood and Treasure is a fine game; I bought it too. I think we should all buy as many OSR products as we can.

Whether or not to use these proficiencies is a tough call. Some of them are rather more powerful than related proficiencies in ACKS.

The way I usually think about balance is to consider "what would happen if a gave a villain these proficiencies"?

Empower Spell: A villain with a sleep spell would wipe out an entire low-level party. A villain with a fireball would wipe out an entire mid-level party. I'd disallow.

Enlarge Spell: A villain with this proficiency could do a long-range ambush with a fireball or lightning bolt, or an illusion or summoning from a great distance. This would be interesting and not game breaking. Probably fine.

Extend Spell: Given the length of most ACKS buffs, and the ease of dispel magic in ACKS, this proficiency would not be overly powerful. Probably fine.

Silent Spell/Still Spell: This proficiency is probably not even as useful as the existing Quiet Magic. I'd combine them into one.

Widen Spell: Using the rules in Player's Companion, spell area-of-effect is easily traded-off against spell damage. This proficiency has de facto the same implications as Empower Spell. It also could be unbalancing in mass combat. I'd disallow.

Magical Aptitude: I would definitely NOT permit this as a General Proficiency. Why would you take Craft or Labor when you could take this? You wouldn't.

More Familiar Questions

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/more-familiar-questions>

August 15, 2013

Tag: Q&A

LibraryLass wrote:

Can familiars have special abilities-- flight or poison, for instance? (I was specifically thinking of imps or homunculi when I asked this question, but also things like snakes or crows)

What damage does a familiar do on a successful attack?

And still unanswered from my previous thread on the subject of familiars: what does a familiar save as?

Can familiars have special abilities-- flight or poison, for instance? (I was specifically thinking of imps or homunculi when I asked this question, but also things like snakes or crows)

ALEX: Yes, they can. You can either create these abilities yourself (as Judge), use examples from the ACKS Core Book, or use examples from the Shaman animal companions.

What damage does a familiar do on a successful attack?

ALEX: It depends on the type of creature it is. See above!

And still unanswered from my previous thread on the subject of familiars: what does a familiar save as?

APM: They save as Fighters of a level equal to their Hit Dice.

I definitely under-estimated how popular Familiars would be when I put them in ACKS, and I know it's an area where the game is under-detailed relative to many of its other mechanics.

Caving and Mapping Proficiencies

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/caving-and-mapping-proficiencies>

November 18, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Malo Monkey wrote:

I'm not seeing a big enough difference between these two proficiencies to warrant them being separate. Can someone please illuminate me?

In fact, my reading of the Mapping proficiency suggests that it includes everything that one could do with Caving, plus the ability to draw a map. Since both are General proficiencies, why would one ever select Caving?

Both contain an eidetic memory component. One allows you to make maps. It's not as if someone with Caving couldn't simply draw from memory on the ground, so it seems silly that they wouldn't also be able to make a map on parchment.

I'm also thrown by the idea that those with Caving can only memorize their route and the features of underground caves, cavern complexes, and rivers, but not smoothly hewn rooms, chambers, and corridors. It really doesn't make sense the way that I'm thinking about it, which I admit, is likely totally wrong.

Why not simply have one proficiency to handle both since they seem so similar?

Malo Monkey,

It's less about "dungeon" v. "cave" and more about functional versus spatial.

Caving allows the character to remember functional routes. The "map in your head" is a step-by-step navigation akin to Google Maps. So it's helpful in guiding you to a location in functional terms - such as how far and in what direction it took to get to a destination from some other place. It's not helpful in giving you that place's spatial relationship to other points.

"Take the large tunnel about 100 paces, then turn leftish at the carved boulder. From there we go about 60 paces, and take the side tunnel to the chimney..."

Mapping allows the character to draw pictorial maps. The ability to read, let alone draw, pictorial maps was a rare skill in Antiquity.

As one source wrote, "maps are a distinct information system from written information. Most people today have little trouble converting locational descriptions into planar systems but this wasn't necessarily as intuitive for people who rarely used the concept... Ancient travelers used distance and reckoning. They had the ancient equivalent of the steps you get from Google Maps when asking for directions. The Roman road network was a big help in this regard. When at sea, traders had lists of ports, how far away, and what you could expect to find there. However, it was quite rare for someone to have a pictorial representation of this information."

I hope that helps clarify the difference! You could certainly collapse the two proficiencies into one, or rename "caving" to "underground navigation" if that helps clarify the difference.

Caving (G): The character has learned to keep a map in his head of where he is when exploring underground caves, cavern complexes, and rivers. On a proficiency throw of 11+, the character with this proficiency will be able to automatically know the route he has taken to get where he is, if he was conscious at the time.

Mapping (G): The character can understand and make maps, even if he cannot read or write. With a proficiency throw of 11+, the character can interpret or draft complicated layouts or map an area by memory. This proficiency can be selected multiple times.

DrPete then wrote:

So, out of curiosity... how do you enforce this in play? A common result from the magic item table is a treasure map. Is this a treasure that you require the mapping proficiency to be able to use? Do you require literacy or the mapping proficiency?

When going into a dungeon, do characters need this proficiency to be able to map, or only to be able to map from memory? I tend to think of mapping as covered by the adventuring proficiency, and to be a player side thing, but this harsher reading would make this go from a rare proficiency to a crucial one. Is it only needed by the illiterate (low int) characters if they want to map?

In actual play, I allow any player to draw maps. But if the character has Mapping proficiency, I will assist them in making the map - providing more accurate lengths and widths, letting them know if they've made a blatant mistake, sketching the area out on a battlemat so they can copy it, etc.

It's much harder to map when the Judge says "the room is roughly oval and about 50' wide and maybe 30' deep" versus drawing a shape on a battlemat for them.

Land Surveying Bonus

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/land-surveying-bonus>

November 20, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Nick Dalton wrote:

The text for the Land Surveying proficiency reads, "In dungeons, an explorer with Land Surveying gains a +4 bonus to his throws to escape detection due to his ability to find the best cover."

Does "explorer" there refer to the explorer class or is that being used as a general term? If the latter, does the proficiency then give those without a hide ability an ability to do so on 17+?

Thanks.

The intent of the proficiency is that any character who takes it gets a bonus to detect sinkholes and similar "natural hazards". (This is very useful insofar as such hazards are as dangerous as traps!) Characters who can escape detection by remaining motionless, like Explorers, get an additional benefit of +4 to such throws in dungeons.* Although the proficiency is badly written, please understand that it should include Explorers, Dwarven Delvers, Rangers, and new classes made by the Judge that have some sort of hiding ability. At the Judge's discretion it could also benefit a character wearing an elven cloak.

I'd recommend that you treat the proficiency as follows:

"Land Surveying: The character is an expert at surveying the land around him. With a proficiency throw of 11+, the character can predict dangerous sinkholes, deadfalls, collapses, or rock slides when the character enters the area. In dungeons, an explorer (or other character with similar abilities) with Land Surveying gains a +4 bonus to his throws to escape detection due to his ability to find the best cover."

*Note that by design some proficiencies are simply more valuable to some classes than others. Thieves and others eligible to backstab get more benefit from Acrobatics proficiency than characters who lack backstab. Classes who can create magic items get more benefit from Magical Engineering than characters who cannot.

Healing Proficiency - How Many Attempts?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/healing-proficiency-how-many-attempts>

May 01, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Brandonshire wrote:

So in our last session this question came up: How many times can someone with two ranks of healing attempt to heal someone?

The skill says "If the character selects Healing twice, he can neutralize poison, cure disease, or cure light wounds with a proficiency throw of 18+, once per day per patient." Does this mean they can attempt to "cure light wounds" once and if it fails that's that? Or if the character rolls say a 14, can they try again every 10 minutes or so until they get a success (or something happens to interrupt them).

We felt it was clear that only one attempt could likely be made in the midst of combat, but weren't sure if after a battle, with reasonable conditions and enough time to spare if a player could just keep trying to heal a given patient until they hit that 18+. I can see arguments on both sides of this (and we spent way too much time elucidating both sides of the argument during the session, eventually the Judge just made a ruling and we moved on, with the understanding that we'd ask for clarification later).

The rule is badly written.

The official interpretation is that it is one attempt per patient per day.

As evidence of this, you can point your comrades to the rules for healing of disease in an army in Domains at War:

"Diseased units can be cured through treatment by divine spellcasters and/or healers. It requires one 9th level divine spellcaster, two 7th-8th level divine spellcasters, three 6th level divine spellcasters or chirurgeons, or nine physickers to cure one sickened unit in one week. If there are a greater or lesser number of casters or healers, the rate at which disease can be cured is increased or decreased proportionately."

A 6th level cleric gets one casting of Cure Disease each day. A Chirurgeon can heal attempt to cure 5 patients per day. If the Chirurgeon could keep rolling until he succeeded, he would be 5x as effective as a 6th level cleric. In fact, they are equivalent because the Chirurgeon will fail when treating many patients.

Crafting Proficiency Questions

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/crafting-proficiency-questions>

May 29, 2014

Tag: Q&A

nDervish wrote:

I've got a pair of players (both running dwarves, of course!) who want to make heavy use of the Craft proficiency, but there are some things which aren't clear to me from its description in the core rules:

1) How does Craft's production ability interact with the character's income? The main descriptive text says a master can produce 40 gp of goods per month and the table below says a master has a "Gp Earned/Month" of 40 gp. Does this mean that he produces goods which are sold for 40 gp (i.e., the 40 gp production and 40 gp earned are the same thing)? Or are they separate and, e.g., a master weaponsmith can make 4 spears for himself and his friends, plus he also gets 40 gp cash for miscellaneous side projects? (I assume the former, but want to confirm.)

2) How much do you need to pay apprentices, journeymen, or masters who are in your employ? My players are asserting that they think their subordinates should work for free ("the training and increased productivity is payment enough"), but, if productivity and income are one and the same, then an apprentice working on his master's project gets no direct income of his own (his productivity is added to his master's instead of generating income for himself), so I figure the master has to pay him, or at least cover room and board.

3) Speaking of apprentice, journeyman, and master crafters, is their availability for hire as specialists in each market type specified anywhere? They're not listed as a general type on the "Hiring Availability by Market Class" table. I suppose the Armorer listing could be used for masters in general (since the Armorer's description says he can produce 40 gp/month of equipment), but that still doesn't cover cost or availability of journeymen or apprentices.

4) What is the cost of raw materials for crafting? Realistically, if you sell a crossbow for 30 gp, that's not going to be 30 gp of pure profit.

Also, one other question, which relates to Healing proficiency rather than Craft:

5) What quantity of herbs does a healer consume to gain a bonus on their Healing throws? The herbs are sold in units of 1 lb, but using an entire pound of herbs each time you make a poultice or tincture to treat a single patient seems a bit excessive (even without considering how expensive that makes it).

1) How does Craft's production ability interact with the character's income? The main descriptive text says a master can produce 40 gp of goods per month and the table below says a master has a "Gp Earned /Month" of 40 gp. Does this mean that he produces goods which are sold for 40 gp (i.e., the 40 gp production and 40 gp earned are the same thing)? Or are they separate and, e.g., a master weaponsmith can make 4 spears for himself and his friends, plus he also gets 40 gp cash for miscellaneous side projects? (I assume the former, but want to confirm.)

APM: The production ability is the character's income.

2) How much do you need to pay apprentices, journeymen, or masters who are in your employ? My players are asserting that they think their subordinates should work for free ("the training and increased productivity is payment enough"), but, if productivity and income are one and the same, then an apprentice working on his master's project gets no direct income of his own (his productivity is added to his master's instead of generating income for himself), so I figure the master has to pay him, or at least cover room and board.

APM: You must pay them their "GP Earned /Month". The master (employer) profits from the increased productivity. For example, if Master Mike employs Journeyman Jones, he pays Jones 20gp and Jones produces 30gp.

APM: If you notice under Specialists, an Armorer costs 75gp. Many people have wondered why that's so, when the productivity of an Armorer is only 40gp. To understand why, assume Armor Adam has a full complement of 2 Journeyman and 4 Apprentices. His productivity is $[40 + (2 \times [20 \times 1.5]) + (4 \times [10 \times 1.5])]$, or $[40 + 60 + 60]$ or 160gp. His profit is $[(2 \times 20) + (4 \times 10)]$ 80gp.

APM: If Armorer Adam could be hired for 40gp, with Journeymen and Apprentices at 20gp and 10gp, one could arbitrage the system and produce substantially more (160gp) than it costs in wages ($40 + 40 + 40 = 120$ gp). Armorers and other masters charge 75gp on the open market because they know that when they are hired they will be asked to manage junior employees and so the free market price for their services includes an increase for their productivity.

3) Speaking of apprentice, journeyman, and master crafters, is their availability for hire as specialists in each market type specified anywhere? They're not listed as a general type on the "Hiring Availability by Market Class" table. I suppose the Armorer listing could be used for masters in general (since the Armorer's description says he can produce 40 gp / month of equipment), but that still doesn't cover cost or availability of journeymen or apprentices.

APM: I didn't chart it out, but they would be available in relative proportion to their wages. Therefore you would see about 3.75x the number of Journeymen ($75/20$) and 7.5x the number of Apprentices. Note that this is in excess of the number of Journeymen and Apprentices that the population of Masters could manage. Some craftsmen die before becoming Masters, or don't have the discipline for it, or the opportunity to learn the skills. Some Journeymen are itinerant. This is why wages for these lesser-skilled workers do not reflect their productivity gains under management.

4) What is the cost of raw materials for crafting? Realistically, if you sell a crossbow for 30 gp, that's not going to be 30 gp of pure profit.

APM: Short answer - The cost of raw materials is assumed to be around 25%, but it's built in to every crafter's productivity already and you don't need to worry about the cost of raw materials therefore.

APM: The long answer requires going deep into issues of economic modeling here.

Assumptions are as follows:

A) Assume that, for every good, the cost of raw materials is 25% of market price.

B) Assume that, for every good, its market price is equal to the value added by the craftsman plus the cost of the raw materials that went into it.

C) Assume that the cost of raw materials is determined by cost of production (labor cost) as a good.

D) Assume labor is equally efficient across all crafts and therefore that labor cost and productivity are the same.

E) Assume that each craftsman is capable of gathering his own raw materials, or bartering time spent in his own craft for raw materials from other crafters.

Therefore cost of raw materials can be ignored. To see how this works in practice...

APM: Take a Craftsman - say, a Shipwright - with a productivity of 40gp per month. With 20 working days per month, he has a productivity of 2gp per day. He wishes to make a sailboat costing 40gp.

A) If market price is 40gp, and cost of raw materials is 25% of market price, the cost in raw materials is $(40 \times .25)$ 10gp.

B) If the market price, 40gp, is equal to the value added by the craftsman plus the cost of the raw materials that went into it, and the cost of the raw materials is 10gp, then the value added by the craftsman is $(40-10)$ 30gp. He will need $(30/2)$ 15 days to make the sailboat once he gets the raw materials.

C) The cost of raw materials is 10gp, which itself is due to the cost of the raw material provider's labor - let's call him the carpenter.

D) Since labor is equally efficient across all crafts, the carpenter also has a productivity of 2gp per day and it took him $(10/2)$ 5 days to procure the raw materials.

E) In order to get the raw materials to produce the sailboat, the Shipwright barter 5 days of work to the Carpenter. Or the Shipwright is himself a Carpenter and spends 5 days doing carpentry to get the raw materials. In either case, the Shipwright's total time investment is $(15 \text{ days} + 5 \text{ days})$ 20 days of work, which is the equivalent of 40gp of productivity.

APM: Expressed over a time period of 60 working days:

- If the shipwright buys his goods, and exclusively makes sailboats (at 15 days per raft), then the shipwright makes 4 rafts at a profit of 30gp each, for 120gp in earnings.

- If the shipwright barter for his goods, then the shipwright makes 3 rafts at a profit of 40gp each, for 120gp in earnings. Some other incidental goods were also made.

From the shipwright's perspective the situation is identical. The only reason you would care one way or another is if you were a third-party with more gold and more urgent need for boats.

APM: In Domains at War: Campaigns, where we track these things more carefully, the following rule is noted: "Raw materials may be bought with cash at a market. If purchased at market, the raw materials will cost 25% of the total cost of the construction project, but the labor cost is reduced by 25%."

APM: At the very core of the economy of course there are the rawest of materials which are collected from the ground by unskilled labor. Unskilled labor earns much less by Craftsmen. But we do not for that reason discount the cost of raw materials to the value of their labor. Rather the difference between the cost of their labor (3gp - 6gp per month) and the cost of raw materials is assumed to go to the owner of the quarry / lumberyard / mine.

Also, one other question, which relates to Healing proficiency rather than Craft:

5) What quantity of herbs does a healer consume to gain a bonus on their Healing throws? The herbs are sold in units of 1 lb, but using an entire pound of herbs each time you make a poultice or tincture to treat a single patient seems a bit excessive (even without considering how expensive that makes it).

APM: It's 1 lb per treatment. You can assume that the pound of herbs includes the container to hold them and keep them fresh and the various implements necessary to use them.

It's like when you buy Advil and it's a huge box with 4 pills inside.

nDervish then wrote:

Thanks for the thorough answers!

Given the reasoning on why the master armorer costs more than his productivity, shouldn't journeymen also have an elevated cost, since they can supervise apprentices?

There's no scarcity of journeyman to make their wages go up, and the productivity increase for the journeymen to apprentice isn't better than that of master to apprentice.

If you want to assume that some percentage of journeymen are acting as mini-masters you could do so, but then you'd likely need to bring down the wages of masters...

At a certain point it gets head-breaking. :)

Evasion

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/evasion>

July 24, 2014

Tag: Q&A

mbeacom wrote:

I see Explorers get a +5 bonus to the proficiency throw to evade encounters. And that even when surprised, they can do so on a 19+. But what is the target when not surprised? I can't seem to find it anywhere. And does the +5 apply when surprised? Also, what is the target number for the Adventuring proficiency when players are engaging in typical adventuring task proficiency throws? Thanks!

bobloblah then wrote:

I am not an Autarch! However...

mbeacom said: *I see Explorers get a +5 bonus to the proficiency throw to evade encounters. And that even when surprised, they can do so on a 19+. But what is the target when not surprised?*

See the Wilderness Evasion chart on page 100.

mbeacom said: *And does the +5 apply when surprised?*

As we've handled it, no. It's a 19+, straight up, although we did modify for size (once again, see the Wilderness Evasion chart on page 100). I wouldn't be surprised to learn that the bonus is supposed to apply, though (Alex?). It's an area of the rules that lacks clarity.

mbeacom said: *Also, what is the target number for the Adventuring proficiency when players are engaging in typical adventuring task proficiency throws?*

There isn't one given, as the idea behind the proficiency is that it covers simple tasks that generally don't need a proficiency throw. On the odd occasion we've needed one, we've used 11+, which appears to be the default value on a lot of proficiencies.

The standard tasks that use Adventuring proficiency are:

- Listening for noises 18+
- Searching for traps 18+
- Bashing open doors 18+
- Searching for secret doors 18+
- Avoiding getting lost in the wilderness (varies)
- Evading wilderness encounters (varies)
- Swimming (varies)

It also covers a variety of activities that can be performed without a throw:

- Riding a horse in normal conditions
- Handling common animals
- Setting a camp
- Lighting a fire
- Cooking simple meals
- Cleaning and maintaining weapons and armor
- Appraising treasure

Etc.

bobloblah then wrote:

Alex said: *The standard tasks that use Adventuring proficiency are:*

- Listening for noises 18+
- Searching for traps 18+
- Bashing open doors 18+
- Searching for secret doors 18+
- Avoiding getting lost in the wilderness (varies)
- Evading wilderness encounters (varies)
- Swimming (varies)

Hunh! I thought those were the base chances for everybody, regardless. So, out of curiosity, what would you say are the chances of a 0th Level Human to perform those tasks?

I have carefully reviewed your request and, based on myself as a representative 0th level human, using my performance in these subtasks, I would assume 20+ for all of the above, except for getting lost (-4 to -8 penalty), evading (-4 penalty) and swimming (amazing physico-savant ability, 2+.)

Wakefulness Proficiency

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/wakefulness-proficiency>

September 06, 2014

Tag: **Q&A**

Malo Monkey wrote:

Does the elf-only Wakefulness proficiency help with reducing both the time to gain natural healing and regain spell-casting ability, or just the latter?

Normally it takes a full day of complete rest to get those precious 1d3 hit points back.

It would primarily affect spellcasting ability, rest required in between guard shifts, and so on.

How Does Trapping Work?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/how-does-trapping-work>

December 17, 2014

Tag: Q&A

SaruSama wrote:

The trapping description is kind of vague. It says on an 11+ you can create a trap that can catch a elephant sized creature which is fine if your hunting or setting up an ambush. However how would it work if you wanted to say trap the area around your campsite at night? How long would each trap take? Would it be one check to set up a bunch of traps surrounding it or multiple ones for each trap? How long would it take to dismantle the traps? etc...

Aryxymaraki then wrote:

I am torn between two gut reactions. (Also, I am not an Autarch.)

The way I would rule it if a player asked this while we were playing: I would say it takes 1d6 hours per trap. (The exact number can be changed, but it takes quite a while to construct even a basic snare or deadfall, it should be measured in hours.)

The way I kind of want to answer it at some point: Give the character with Trapping a construction rate as per Domains at War construction rules. You can then figure out how long it takes to make any given trap based on the elements of that trap and its GP value. Off the top of my head, 21 gp/month (7 gp/day) seems reasonable. (It's roughly half the rate of a craft master, but restricted to a specific type of thing. I picked 21 instead of 20 for the round number.)

koewn then wrote:

That's a pretty good idea; that way it scales. (cause you know someone somewhere will get into a position where they want to set a pile of snares up for some convoluted player reason)

Could treat it as a limited/primitive form of Siege Engineering; so that the Trapping character could oversee some amount of work done on his behalf.

You two have hit on the "ACKSy" solution. Definitely treat it as a Construction Project.

I'd give Trappers a wage of around 25gp per month (equivalent to other highly skilled one-proficiency professions such as artillerist and healer), about equal to a Journeyman. For simplicity, call it 1gp per day.

Trap prices can be found in Player's Companion. Here are some examples:

Pit, open earth, 10' x 10' x 10' (1d6 damage per 10') 20gp

Pit (as above) with spikes (1d4 spikes each dealing 1d6 damage) 120gp

Trap, rolling rock (rolls from hidden location, save v. Blast or 3d6 damage) 400gp

Obviously, those prices are expensive! But these prices appear in the Strongholds & Structures section; they are for structural traps: Permanent, long-lasting traps that will survive rugged conditions with little maintenance.

D@W's price differences for "crude" versus "ballistic" ballista ammunition suggest that rough-and-ready ammo costs as little as 1% of the cost of professional well-crafted ammo. I think we could make a similar assumption for crude "trapper's traps" and say they cost 1% of permanent traps.

That would suggest:

Pit, open earth, 10' x 10' x 10' (1d6 damage per 10') 0.2gp

Pit spikes (1d4 spikes each dealing 1d6 damage), 10' x 10' 1.2gp

Trap, rolling rock (rolls from hidden location, save v. Blast or 3d6 damage) 4gp

That suggests a crude pit would take a few hours; a crude pit with punji-stakes about a day; and a rock deadfall a few days to construct. None of these would survive long (a pit would collapse on itself, a deadfall snap or fall apart, etc) but they will last "long enough" in most cases.

Since "crude ammo" imposes a -2 penalty to attack throws, let us make a similar rule that a "trapper's traps" are detected and removed at +2, and where applicable attack at a -2 penalty or provide a +2 bonus to saving throw to avoid their effects.

Chapter 5: Spells

Cost of Changing Spell Repertoire

<http://autarch.co/forum/cost-changing-spell-repertoire-0>

February 10, 2012

Tag: Q&A

demoss wrote:

I'm squinting at the 1000gp/spell level cost of replacing a spell in repertoire with another. I don't have a terrific handle yet on the amount of loose cash higher level (say 5+) characters have, but during the lower levels 1000gps is a lot of money. It seems like it would effectively keep mages from changing their repertoires during the first few levels much at all.

What's the design intention? What would break if changing spell repertoire was drastically cheaper or didn't have a cost at all -- merely the 1 week/spell level time requirement?

It's deliberate in that the idea is to make changing the spell repertoire expensive enough that mages don't do it lightly. The concept grew out of a dissatisfaction with 3.5-style wizards who had an answer for every problem with a night's rest. Since ACKS mages can free-cast without memorization, it's really generous to let them change their repertoire at all ;)

That said, the 1,000gp/spell level cost is purely "fantasy" - it doesn't break any of the economics per se.

If you want to help out low-level wizards you could say

120gp for 1st level

600gp for 2nd level

3000gp for 3rd level

4000gp for 4th level etc

or something like that.

[HR] Cure X Spell Change

<http://autarch.co/forums/house-rules/hrcure-x-spell-change>

June 16, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

While cure spells getting better as the caster raises in level makes a certain kind of sense, but doesn't address why a cure light wound spell gets worse as characters advance. Granted a lot of this is simply naming convention, and if it hadn't been called Light Wounds this might not be a problem. But it is, and so it is.

So I'm kind of kicking this idea around, but don't know if I'll actually go for it.

The idea I was thinking that what should happen is this. Casting cure spells should be relevant to the power of the target, not the caster. So a cure will still be awesome to a 1st level guy, but as they get higher, it won't lose as much utility.

Cure I: 1d6+1 per level of the target (+0 for normals). Max of 1d6+4

Cure II (Moderate): 2d6+1 per level of target, max 2d6+7

Cure III (Serious): 3d6+1 per level of target, max 3d6+10

Cure IV (Critical): 4d6+1 per level of target, max 4d6+14

For a slightly more radical approach:

I: as above

II: as above, max 2d6+8

III: 2d6+2 per level, max 2d6+20

IV: 2d6+3 per level, max 2d6+42

The fact that cure spells don't correlate well with the abstract nature of hit points is one of the ongoing hot spots in every D&D style game. Your idea definitely has merit.

By way of response, I'll share my own "in-world" justification for how the cure spells work.

1. Cure spells are intended to be applied to characters that are already at 0 or less hit points, e.g., characters that have clearly taken a real, hard wound.
2. The more negative *any* character's hit points are, the worse this wound. Cure light wounds is helpful for characters that are only a bit below zero, but is less likely to help someone who is at -10 hp or more. In contrast, Cure critical wound can save the life of a grievously or even mortally wounded character.

-
3. When used on characters that are not actually brutally wounded (e.g. are above 0 hp), cure spells simply restore vim and vigor, close up some bruises, ease some joint aches, etc. A low level character is more readily winded and less able to deal with pain and shock, but conversely gets a relatively greater benefit from such. A high level character has a naturally high pain tolerance and has "been through it before," so he gets a relatively lower benefit from such. (E.G.: A band-aid is the same whether you are a kid or a special forces trooper. The same wound that will make a kid want a band-aid will make a special forces trooper sneer in contempt.)

Nothing above wouldn't work as a justification for cure spells based on character level, of course.

Restore Life & Limb - Time Limit

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/restore-life-limb-time-limit>

June 28, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

MichaelPfaff wrote:

The spell pretty explicitly explains that there is a time limit for returning people from the grave, but is there a time limit to restoring limbs and permanent wounds?

No, there's no time limit for restoring limbs or permanent wounds.

Detect Magic & Invisibility

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/detect-magic-invisibility>

June 28, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Beragon wrote:

I've got a question on detecting invisible creatures/objects via Detect Magic.

So the spell does not detect invisible creatures/objects, but the magic itself is seen as an amorphous glowing fog.

Will the caster "know" this to be an invisibility effect? Or is it reasonable to assume that it's just a magic aura of some sort, being one of many possible types of magical auras.

I'm leaning toward the latter, as I don't think the spell lets the caster know what type of magic a creature/object is subject to... but only its presence.

That's correct. It just detects an amorphous glowing magical aura.

Losing Spellbooks

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/losing-spellbooks>

July 26, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Rodriquez wrote:

My players freed a high level wizard from some sort of stasis and now I wondered what happens with the spells that he still has in his repertoire (His spellbook was stolen a long time ago).

The rules state that for each week without spellbook he loses one spell level but can rewrite the spells from memory for the cost of 1000 GP and 1 week of work for each spell level.

Does that mean:

- *While writing down his 5th level spell he will lose 5 1-level spells?*
 - *Can he choose what spell he forgets?*
 - *Does he lose a 4-level spell at the beginning or at the end of a 4 week period?*
 - *Can he only write spells into his spellbook that are still in his repertoire or also the ones that got lost already?*
- 1) While writing down his 5th level spell, he might lose 5 1st level spells, or 2 2nd and 1st, etc.
 - 2) The Judge picks what spells are lost. I would recommend that he lose the highest level spells first, and work down from there.
 - 3) You lose the spells at the beginning of the period.
 - 4) He can only write spells into his spellbook that are still in his repertoire. If he ends up knowing less than his maximum number, he has to re-learn them via research, scrolls, etc.

Note that if your wizard has been in stasis he won't have lost anything ... yet.

Spell Creation - Am I Doing It Right?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/spell-creation-am-i-doing-it-right>

September 20, 2012

Tag: Q&A

James S wrote:

I've created this spell for my Sunspear of Sol class and wanted to check my workings:

Pilum of Fire Range: 60' Divine 2 Duration: 1 round per level

With this spell, the Chosen of Sol summons into existence a number of javelins of pure solar flame equal to 1 + 1 for every 5 levels of experience. When thrown, using the casters Attack Throw, each Pilum of Fire will cause 1d8 Fire damage to a target, including to creatures only affected by magical weapons (but not to creatures immune to fire). Range increments apply as for any ranged weapon. Unused javelins will remain in existence for 1 round per caster level before dissipating.

Workings:

Blast Spell

Effects: 1d8 damage per level (35), Maximum 1d damage (x0.1), Blast is Fire Based (x1)

Targeting: 1 creature + 1 per 5 additional levels (x2), Attack Throw required (x0.35)

Duration: 1 round per level (x4)

Range: 60' (x0.7)

Saving Throw: None (x1)

Source: Divine (x2.25)

= 15.435

Have I missed anything out? Should I be doing anything else?

Does the fact it hits magic creatures add anything?

Does the fact that creatures immune to fire are unaffected remove anything?

Does the fact that it takes range modifiers into account change anything? (Could I get away with removing that element without changing the cost?)

I could, in theory, boost the damage up to 1d10 or 2d4 and it's still a 2nd level spell if I'm doing the maths right.

For reference, this will probably replace Enthrall on the Bladedancer spell list, as I don't feel it's appropriate for my version of the class.

Have I missed anything out? Should I be doing anything else?

APM: The intent of "duration" for blast spells is that it be the duration of damage, e.g. damage over time. From your description of the spell, it seems like you just want the cleric to be able to hurl the pilums of fire at any time within the duration. I'd rate that as a x2 multiplier, not a x4 multiplier.

Does the fact it hits magic creatures add anything?

APM: No, magic harms magical creatures by default.

Does the fact that creatures immune to fire are unaffected remove anything?

APM: No, that's reflected in the cost multiplier for being a fire effect. Creatures that are vulnerable to fire would take more damage, for example, and the fire might have special effects on the environment.

Does the fact that it takes range modifiers into account change anything? (Could I get away with removing that element without changing the cost?)

APM: Yes, that would be a cost modifier. I'd go with x0.85, so that a range of 60' with range penalties costs as much as a range of 30' without range penalties.

James S then wrote:

Hi Alex,

Thank you for this. You're correct in that the intent is for the cleric to be able to hurl the pilums of fire at any time during the duration.

With the cost modifier for taking range penalties into account, I just want to check my understanding. You're saying that 'Attack throw uses range penalties' should have a separate modifier of x0.85 so the usual 0.7 multiplier for range 60 would be 0.595 rounded to 0.6, which is the multiplier for range 30?

Seems good to me if that's the case.

In either case (ranged penalties or no ranged penalties) but an attack throw is required, how would you adjudicate casting a blast spell like this at an opponent engaged in melee? Allow it? Disallow it? Only allow if the cleric has precise shooting, at -4?

I'm minded to only allow it if the cleric has precise shooting, as per the standard rules for ranged combat. I'd be interested to read if anyone has a different perspective.

Right. I'd suggest that the effect modifier be called "attack throw is treated as missile fire". That would impose range penalties and an inability to fire into melee without penalty.

How Long to Kill Someone Paralyzed/Held?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/how-long-kill-someone-paralyzedheld>

November 05, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

Malo Monkey wrote:

How are physical attacks against paralyzed or magically held creatures resolved? The rules on magically slept creatures are clear, but not so for those who are paralyzed or held.

Is it one round of effort for someone not otherwise engaged as with the Sleep spell? Is it automatic hits and simply use the normal hit point system?

How about magical attacks that do damage and those that call for saving throws?

Thanks in advance for your answer.

All attacks on helpless creatures are handled like Sleep.

Scrolls vs Research

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/scrolls-vs-research>

January 04, 2013

Tag: Q&A

jedavis wrote:

I've recently run into a conundrum with spell acquisition. My party's wizard just hit 7th level, and as he has no master or guild at this time, is having to research, beg, buy, or steal all of his 4th level spells. Researching a 4th level spell will take him 8 weeks and cost him 4000 gp, of which he recoups 400 gp as library value, and has a probability of success of 60% given his Int bonus of +1. He will gain no campaign XP, since 2000 gp / month is below his threshold of 2500 gp / month. Or, since there's a class II market down the river, he could take a week-long trip down thataways and pick up scrolls of 4th-level spells at 4000 gp each, of which the table shows one available. By the rules as written, there should be one scroll of each 4th-level spell available for purchase. I'm inclined to limit this at the very most to spells available in the Core (ie, not those in the Player's Companion), but even that seems a bit lenient. Should I roll a random language for each of these scrolls each month? Even that is fairly-easily circumvented by picking up a scroll of Read Languages first (1000 gp) and loading that to repertoire (another 1000 gp), of which there are two per month, and so one will probably be in a language which is legible... Since the expected value of a geometric random variable with $p=0.6$ is $5/3$, the expected costs of researching a 4th-level spell are really 6666 gp and 14 weeks, so this route generates a savings in expectation, even if just learning one 4th-level spell, and it scales far better than researching each spell individually. Perhaps fortunately, Mr. Wizard hasn't figured this out yet, but I'd like to be ready when he does.

The question, then, is "What sort of restrictions do y'all put in place to prevent casters from learning spells purely via purchased scrolls? Are there any compelling reasons to perform spell research for spells which already exist, or is spell research purely useful for creating new spells?"

Hi Jedavis, A few thoughts in response.

1. Spell research is intended to be much harder and more expensive than copying a spell from a scroll. The availability of such items is a major reason why mages would go to cities and/or collaborate. Spell research becomes much more valuable when you can't get a scroll, want to create a new spell, or want to experiment.

2. If, as Judge, you think some spells ought not be available for sale, then they simply aren't available for sale. Keep in mind that everything in ACKS is based on the "average" city, "average" ruler, and so on. But in the real world, no one is actually average. There are no US families that actually have 1.5 kids. So you can and should individualize your cities, markets, nobles, and so on. The data in ACKS is baselines, not straightjackets. So, you can always play with the relative market sizes, as Jard maintains.

3. The way the "number of items available" charts were created was by estimating the size of the economies, estimating the number of products, the number of items at each price level, and then coming up with some averages. This can be expressed mathematically:

Aggregate Money Supply / Average Price of Goods = Average Quantity of Goods

Average Quantity of Goods / Number of Different Types of Goods = Average Quantity of Each Type of Good

But that means that if, for example, you were to double the number of theoretical spells in existence, you actually should HALVE the number of spell scrolls available of each individual spell. To the extent you reduce the number of one scroll, increase the number of another so it averages out. So for example, if you want all the spells in PC to be available (doubling the number of scrolls) then there should only be a 50% chance of each scroll being available. If Necromancer mages make up 85% of the mages in our city, then maybe there are 3-4 scrolls of each necromancy spell but less than 1 of other types. And so on. Does that make sense?

4. The rules lay quiet on whether or not your spell signature changes when you copy a spell from someone else. If when you purchase and copy a scroll, you get that caster's spell signature, or something like it, that might cause fun/interesting ramifications that would change the cold, hard math.

Shaman Skinchange, What Qualifies?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/shaman-skinchange-what-qualifies>

November 30, 2012

Tag: Q&A

prototype00 wrote:

For the spell Skinchange, which states:

This spell allows the caster to assume the form of a normal or giant animal. (See the Animals type in the Monsters chapter of Adventurer Conqueror King System for details).

Are all the animals (and their giant versions) listed in the ACKS corebook fair game? Or are prehistoric creatures yet another category of animal that doesn't qualify?

Also, even if it is just animals, does this mean for a pirate adventure, I can skinchange into a sperm whale (which is a "normal animal")

This spell allows the caster to assume the form of a normal or giant animal.

Animals are a type of monster that includes apes, rock baboons, bats, bears, boars, camels, cats, crocodiles, dogs, elephants, ferrets, fish, hawks, herd animals, horses, lizards, mules, octopuses, rats, rhinoceroses, shark, shrews, snakes, squids, toads, weasels, whales, wolves, and any other creatures of sub-human intelligence that occur in the real world. Giant animals are merely larger version of normal animals, and therefore part of this type. Prehistoric animals, such as cave bears, dinosaurs, mastodons, saber-toothed tigers, and titanotheres are also animals.

Are all the animals (and their giant versions) listed in the ACKS corebook fair game?

All monsters of the "animal" type are fair game. Note that oozes and vermins are not animals.

Are prehistoric creatures yet another category of animal that doesn't qualify?

Prehistoric creatures do qualify. However, I would require that the character (not the player) know such a creature existed in order to transform into it. I would also require that at least one specimen of the species be still alive in some "lost continent" somewhere, so that no extinct animals would be permitted.

If you think this makes the spell too powerful, you could rule that certain prehistoric animals were actually prehistoric fantastic creatures if you think that's more appropriate. E.g. you could treat dinosaurs as prehistoric dragons. That would exclude them from the spell's effect.

Even if it is just animals, does this mean for a pirate adventure, I can skinchange into a sperm whale (which is a "normal animal")

Yes, you can change into a sperm whale.

Note that since the caster acquires the physical characteristics of the animal, the skinchanged caster will probably not be able to speak and certainly cannot cast spells. At best, transforming into a parrot might allow him to speak, and transforming into a chimpanzee might allow him to use certain equipment.

Still, it's a great spell. It's quite fun to turn into a sparrow, fly behind the enemy, then turn into an elephant and trample them. I'm not sure it's more effective than just fireballing them, but it's fun.

Tywyll then wrote:

One other question: how do you determine what kind of animals the character can know to turn into? Does the spell front load your awareness of 'normal animals' so you can automatically turn into those things, or do you need to have seen an elephant/wolf/giant otter before you can become one?

Further, do you need to study the animal (like up close or a corpse) or simply seeing it once allow you to transform into it?

I've been limiting it to animals the character has likely seen or heard about (especially since they got it through Apostasy rather than being a Shaman), so the character has been limited to temperate climate animals and the ones they've encountered in game. If they pick up Naturalism I'm saying they also get the common animals from that territory.

I guess I'm hesitant to let it work like 3E Wildshape where players assumed they had an encyclopedic knowledge of every animal in the monster manual just...because.

And thanks btw for the detailed response!

Great question. I definitely would not assume that the spell gives you any knowledge of animals, no. That's the road to madness.

If you need an objective way of handling you might try something like this:

1. Reference the Wandering Monsters in the Wilderness table, Subtable: Animals
2. Select 2 terrain types representative of the character's background and upbringing. These are the animals the character is intimately familiar with.

-
3. Select 2 terrain types representative of environments quite unfamiliar to the character. (Prehistoric and one other). These are animals the character would have to encounter in-game to be able to transform into as he's not familiar with them at all (unless they are on the prior list).
 4. All other animals the character can transform into if he makes a Naturalism proficiency throw 11+ to remember them, or encounters them in game.
 5. Ignore any references to monsters that don't count as animals (such as spiders).

EXAMPLE: Shem is a desert shaman. He is intimately familiar with barrens and deserts, so he can transform into Antelope, Camel, Cave Bear, Dire Wolf, Eagle, Gecko Lizard, Giant Hawk, Hawk, Lion, Mountain Lion, Pit Viper, Rattler, Rock Baboon, Tuatara Lizard, Vulture, Wild Dog, and Wild Goat. He is unfamiliar with Prehistoric and Jungle and cannot transform into animals such as Boar, Giant Shrew, Python, Mastodon, Monkey, Spitting Cobra, or Tyrannosaurus.

We're deep in house-rules land, obviously.

So, Was Spell Storing This Broken in B/X?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/so-was-spell-storing-broken-bx>

February 01, 2013

Tag: Q&A

MichaelPfaff wrote:

What am I missing? The spell effectively allows the caster to pump all his spells into an item and the next day he can cast DOUBLE the amount of spells he normally can. For a single spell each day, you are twice as powerful.

Please explain this to me so I don't have to ban it...

4th Level Spell

This spell prepares a necklace, ring, or similar item to have up to six spells stored within it. Only the character who casts spell storing may store spells in the item. The caster stores spells in the item by casting them one at a time. All spells to be stored must be cast within 1 turn of spell storing being cast. Thereafter, any character who puts the item on automatically gains the knowledge of which spells are stored, and may discharge them as if a spellcaster of the minimum level required to cast the spell. The spells will remain stored in the item until discharged, or until one day passes, whichever comes first. This spell is used to create rings of spell storing.

witness then wrote:

I would probably rule that "one day passes" at about the same time you recover your spell slots. It's not necessarily a literal 24-hours from when you cast Spell Storing.

The point of the spell (I think) is to be able to pass off some of your spellcasting ability to another character, in the form of an item.

Witness is correct, "one day passes" when the mage recovers his spell slots.

Sorry for writing the spell badly. The intent of this spell is not that you can cast it at 11:59pm, go to bed, wake up at 8:01am, refresh your spells, and have double your spells available until 11:59pm that night. The intent is to let an arcane caster 'store' a spell and give it another person to use. For instance, if you want the highly stealthy thief to sneak forward and cast ESP, or you want the powerful fighter to be able to deliver a touch spell.

MichaelPfaff then wrote:

Alex, is it intended to store a single spell?

It can have different spells.

MichaelPfaff then wrote:

Tom, the minimum caster level thing is not my doing. That's part of the spell / item itself. I didn't change that.

*As for the same limitations as casting the spell normally, our interpretation is that the item doesn't not replicate the spell effect itself, the item imparts the ability to cast those spells, literally *granting the user the ability to cast those spells as if they were a magic user*. This way, a 1st Level Fighter with a Ring of Spell Storing suddenly isn't better than the Mage who actually cast the spell in the first place because he can activate it instantly, not be interrupted, etc. Secondly, it prevents Mages from abusing the spell in order to circumvent those restrictions entirely themselves.*

Our ruling is based around focusing on the intent of the spell to allow non-casters to be able to cast these spells and the Mage to be able to "hand off" some of his casting ability, like Witness said above.

This is absolutely the correct interpretation. The ring of spell storing does NOT function like a wand or staff where the wielder can move and discharge it.

Temples/Restore Life & Limb

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/temples-restore-life-limb>

January 23, 2013

Tag: Q&A

MichaelPfaff wrote:

For the purposes of this spell, what qualifies as a temple of the spellcaster's god? My PCs want to create a shrine to their god basically. There's not really much guidance on shrines or other holy sites, but I'm thinking something like this could work.

I'm almost thinking something similar to chaotic altars, but erected by lawful clerics, using the gp rule for sacrifices? So, if the PCs are out in the wilds of some random place they can have a high level priest erect an altar, sacrifice some gold, cast some blessings and consecrate the ground to make a holy altar that can act as a "temple" for the purposes of RL&L.

Thoughts?

It's purposefully left vague so that the Judge can adjudicate as he deems appropriate. It could be a cathedral, it could be standing stones like Stonehenge, or it could just be a Shinto-friendly grove of natural beauty.

Your suggestion of treating it like a chaotic altar is a great one that I will personally steal for my own campaign.

How Do Spell Research Breakthroughs Work?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/how-do-spell-research-breakthroughs-work>

February 26, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

When a major breakthrough raises the spell level by "1 level", does that mean "10 points" or "up to the minimum for the next level". Something else?

When a minor breakthrough raises a spell's power by "1/2 level", does that mean "5 points" or "halfway between its current power and the minimum for the next spell level"?

Does a minor breakthrough on Ventriloquism (12 points) get me a 16 point spell?

What's the halfway point on Magic Missile (10 points)?

Maybe I'm just misunderstanding.

Then, once you've gained four point of Ventriloquism, what do you do with it? Do you just totally rebuild the spell and try to hit that bonus number? It seems like it would be tricky to reverse engineer a few extra points into a spell.

Thanks!

When a major breakthrough raises the spell level by "1 level", does that mean "10 points" or "up to the minimum for the next level". Something else?

APM: You get 10 points.

When a minor breakthrough raises a spell's power by "1 / 2 level", does that mean "5 points" or "halfway between its current power and the minimum for the next spell level"?

APM: You get 5 points.

Then, once you've gained four point of Ventriloquism, what do you do with it? Do you just totally rebuild the spell and try to hit that bonus number? It seems like it would be tricky to reverse engineer a few extra points into a spell.

APM: The Judge and the player should collaborate on an appropriate outcome. Generally you should rebuild the spell and try to hit the bonus number, but if your tastes run to the quirky or gonzo, you could also just "add" 5 - 20 points of other effects. With the Judge's permission, you could even create a second spell of 5-20 points, which is a sort of byproduct or side effect or dual effect. For example, imagine a Lightning Bolt that leaves a lingering glow in the area (like a Light spell).

Copying Spells: What Cost?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/copying-spells-what-cost>

March 09, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Ludanto wrote:

I understand spell repertoires well enough, but what happens if you just want to copy a scroll into your spell-book? Does it just take a negligible amount of time? Does it take a week? A week per spell level? A week or more and thousands of gold?

It take one week of study. There's no cost other than ink and parchment. The cost has been "paid in advance" by the creator of the scroll, so as to speak.

1 Turn of Tuning for ESP?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/1-turn-tuning-esp>

March 11, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Ludanto wrote:

The ESP spells says, in part:

"The caster must designate a direction, and then concentrate for a turn in order to "hear" the thoughts."

Now, does that mean that ESP takes 10 minutes of "tuning" (or whatever) before it starts to work, or is it simply restating the fact that "listening" with the spell requires concentration, and that you can only change the direction listened every 10 minutes?

Ludanto, it takes 10 minutes of "tuning" to work.

Summon Dragon

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/summon-dragon>

March 15, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

Call Dragon. This spell seems really powerful compared to other spells of a similar or higher level. How do you keep it in check? What stops pcs from sending it into a dungeon to clear it out for them? There is no guideline on the physical size of the dragon so I'm not sure how large it is supposed to be.

I guess it just really feels like an 'I win' button in a way that even 6th level wizard spells don't. After all....there is no Save vs Dragon!

1. The dragon is almost certainly be too large to fit into a standard dungeon (see below).
2. The dragon can only be summoned once per week, and it takes 10 minutes to do so. Once summoned the dragon can only stick around for an hour or two.
3. The dragon can be dispelled with dispel magic with no saving throw. 6th level clerics and 5th level mages can both cast dispel magic. A goblin tribe's witch doctor or shaman could thus deal with the dragon, as could any evil dark lord of even modest level.

My expectation was that Call Dragon would primarily be used in pitched battles fought outdoors. But if you are finding it's overly powerful as used in the context of your campaign, then ditch it.

As to your subsidiary question: How big is a dragon? ACKS states that a 1 HD pterodactyl has a 10' wingspan, while a 5 HD pteranodon has a 25' wingspan. Let's therefore assume the formula for calculating wingspan from HD is:

$$\text{wingpan} = \text{HD}^{(1/2)} * 10 \text{ feet}$$

Therefore a 14 HD dragon has 38' wingspan, a 20 HD dragon has a 45' wingspan, and a 36 HC roc has a 60' wingspan. (The formula scales down, too: A 1hp bird (.22HD) would have a wingspan of .48' or about 6".)

The largest known flying creature in real life is Quetzalcoatlus, with a wingspan estimated at 36'. That would make it a 13HD monster in ACKS. It seems to have had a length of about 90% of its wingspan, and a width at the shoulder of about 20% of its wingspan. If a dragon has a similar build to a Quetzalcoatlus, then an Old Dragon would be (45' x 0.9) 40.5' long and 9' wide at the shoulder. Given that dragons are generally depicted as sturdier and better armored than pteranodons and their ilk, it's likely to be even thicker.

Skinchange and HP

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/skinchange-and-hp>

March 22, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

How does Skinchange effect a caster's HP if at all?

Also do they get the benefit of their attributes like Con or Str? I assumed not.

Skinchange does not affect a caster's HP.

According to the spell description, "the caster gains the physical capabilities, physical attacks, special abilities, and statistics of the animal form he assumes, while retaining his own mental abilities."

So what are the monster's physical abilities and statistics?

One thing is clear: Monsters do not have ability score modifiers in ACKS the way they do in, for example, 3.5. In D&D 3.5, for example, a Lion has +11 STR, +7 DEX, +5 CON, -8 INT, +2 WIS, -4 CHA.

In ACKS, rather than assign ability scores to monsters based on a human mean, we implicitly assume that each monster has an ability score of 10 based on its own species' mean. For example, an average Lion has STR 10, DEX 10, and CON 10 on the Lion scale. One can imagine a Lion with STR 18 (on the Lion scale). Such a Lion would be +3 to hit and deal +3 damage per attack. Or one could imagine a Lion with DEX 18 (on the Lion scale), gaining +3 AC and initiative rolls. Such a monster would, of course, be very rare. [Note that this is a way, way simpler method than the way 3.5 deals with things.]

Skinchange seems to suggest you take on the physical capabilities of an average member of the species, presumably one that has ability scores of 10. So therefore there is an argument that the shapechanged character does not get the benefit of their attributes like Con or Str. That might mean, of course, re-calculating hit points.

You could also rule that the character's ability scores do apply. In that case he might skinchange into a wimpy lion (if he has a low STR) or a burly bat (if he has a high STR) and so on. This would be consistent with why HP stay static.

Finally, you could hand wave it.

Divination, What Can It Divine?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/divination-what-can-it-divine>

April 02, 2013

Tag: Q&A

prototype00 wrote:

So say I scry a friend of mine (to see how he is doing) and find to my horror that he is being held captive by a group of orcs!

Could I then cast divination with the following query:

I would like to rescue my friend in the coming week (goal), where should I travel to to rescue him? (advice needed).

(For reference, here is the divination spell)

Similar to augury but more powerful, a divination spell can provide the caster with a useful piece of advice in reply to a question concerning a specific goal, event, or activity that is to occur within one week. The advice can be as simple as a short phrase, or it might take the form of a cryptic rhyme or omen. If the caster doesn't act on the information, the conditions may change so that the information is no longer useful. The base chance for a correct divination is 60% + 1% per caster level. The Judge should roll this secretly. If the dice roll fails, false information is delivered.

Or do I need a bunch of concrete information about where he is being held before I can cast the divination spell (I thought that was what the divination spell was for, to divine information).

That is absolutely the purpose of divination and a completely reasonable use. HOWEVER, divination does not provide clear-cut answers. I typically offer the answer in the form of a poem or riddle.

For example, in last night's game, the PCs used Divination to ask "Where is Princess Shandalah being held captive?" The answer was "The princess must be freed / from the crypt of great greed." This was an oblique reference to Badr al-Mosak, who I had described a dozen sessions ago as "the greediest man who ever lived". But they figured it out. Of course, they have no idea where his crypt is, but at least they know she's in the Crypt of Badr al-Mosak.

prototype00 then wrote:

So basically if you have very little information (my friend is held captive by orcs and I don't know where!), divination provides a next step in the form of a riddle.

But if you have a lot of information (my friend is held captive by orcs in the citadel of Gad-Gudhur, home of the Orctzar himself! I can either assault it frontally through the gates of Grimnock, from the air or through the sewers of eternal despair) divination can provide more targeted answers like the weakness of the Orctzar or the best route of approach to rescue said friend.

Would that be an accurate summary?

That's precisely how I treat the spell, yes.

Detect Evil

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/detect-evil>

April 08, 2013

Tag: Q&A

miedvied wrote:

I'm having some trouble with Detect Evil-type spells. If we're throwing out the Good/Evil axis and going with Law/Chaos, why is "detecting chaotic creatures" equated to "detecting evil intentions"? It struck a really sour note when I was reading the text. Everything in the text - especially in light of the autarch blog posts - reads as extremely carefully thought out, though. So, before I houserule it, perhaps you could help me understand the intentions behind it?

Thanks.

Great question.

First, let's be clear what the spell does: it detects "creatures with evil intentions, magic items with evil enchantments, undead, sinkholes of evil, and summoned creatures of Chaotic alignment." So it doesn't detect **all** creatures of Chaotic alignment, just summoned creatures of Chaotic alignment. There are only two creatures in the ACKS Core Rules that qualify - Frost Salamanders and Efreeti. Essentially, when we talk about summoned creatures of Chaotic alignment, we are talking about demons and their ilk.

So why do such creatures always detect as evil? There's two reasons, a philosophical one and a pragmatic one.

1) Philosophically, chaotic aligned characters are "agents of entropy and destruction". Summoned chaotic monsters, being inherently chaotic, are inherently agents of entropy and destruction. Therefore they always have evil intentions towards all things. Any good intentions in the near-term are simply drowned out by their long-term commitment to entropy and destruction.

2) Pragmatically, if demons didn't always detect as evil, then the spell could detect their intentions. I didn't (and don't) feel that Detect Evil should be able to tell you whether or not a demon's intentions are evil or not. I think the demon should always radiate malevolence!

"Is this demon going to honor my pact? [detect evil]" "Hmm, he's radiating as actively evil."
"Oh, guess not, then." lame.

miedvied then wrote:

The intentions-of-entropic-creatures part makes sense, but then I guess it makes me wonder why use Chaos vs Law instead of Good vs Evil? Or is that to make the setting more morally gray ("chaos is always 'evil', and law is... well, probably not all that good")?

My first idea for a chaotic PC was something like an anarcho-pacifist thief (with two ranks of profession: banker... heh), and I suppose that although he'd have a thorough philosophical allegiance to Chaos, I didn't picture that as equating to his being loyal to the cause of evil. On the contrary, he'd be loyal to chaos because he considers law inherently evil (I won't recap the whole anarcho-pacifist philosophy here; sufficient to say law = forced obedience = evil).

Given the default assumptions of ACKS, an anarcho-pacifist would qualify as a "madman", I think.

Anarcho-pacifism seeks the elimination of violence from social relations. ACKS assumes the existence of intelligent species engineered for violence and incapable of non-violent relations (e.g. Beastmen, Ghouls) An anarcho-pacifist could not hope to achieve a better world; he would merely achieve the extinction of his species. An anarcho-pacifist should be locked up before his rotten ideas damage the safety of the Realm... or treated the way Ripley treats Burke in Aliens when he suggests they shouldn't kill the aliens.

Consider that Edward Gibbon famously argued that the Christian philosophy of non-violence was the ruin of Rome. More than one ancient Roman would have said that the pagan Roman way of life was Lawful and that Christianity was a dangerous Chaotic religion that sought to bring about the end of this world!)

Obviously there is wide room for latitude here given the width of possible campaign settings. If one altered the assumptions - e.g. beastmen and undead are not innately destructive, merely the tools of authoritarian dark lords who prevent them from self-actualizing to virtue - then of course it's a different outcome. The more you stray from the default assumptions of the setting, the more the default alignments won't make sense.

Nerdnumber1 then wrote:

*Chaos: Chaotic beings actively seek to destroy civil society.
"Chaotic characters are often madmen or cultists of forgotten, chthonic gods. To the extent they have any order at all, societies of Chaotic characters are ruled by force and fear, and are often characterized by all manner of corruption and vice. Even decadent Lawful civilizations at least pay homage to civilizing virtue, but chaotic civilizations embrace their corruption."*

This how the chaotic alignment is described in the ACKs rulebook. Notice the "often madmen or cultists of forgotten, cthonic gods" part and the worse-than-the-worst-lawful-societies part.

Law: "Despite its vices and villainies, civilization must be defended against those who would destroy it. Lawful beings tend to see wars among civilizations as aiding the cause of Chaos, and so they seek peace among Lawful civilizations where possible." i.e. hero alignment

Neutral: "To paraphrase George Orwell, Neutral humans sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because Lawful heroes stand ready to do violence on their behalf." "A Neutral mercenary might be found fighting on behalf of Law or Chaos; a Neutral farmer tends his crops and pays his taxes, whether to the Patriarch or the Lich-King." i.e. Not really much of a hero.

Chaos: "often madmen or cultists of forgotten, cthonic gods" "societies of Chaotic characters are ruled by force and fear" "Chaotic societies are characterized by their monstrous vices: Genocide, human sacrifice, wanton destruction, cannibalism, necrophilia, and so on. Evil is all-too-human in every civilization, but Chaotic is something both less and more than human." i.e. Monsters worse than Hitler.

I like the idea of getting away from the tired old good-vs.-evil alignment system, but Chaos seems to be described as UBER-evil. Only chaotic mages can perform necromancy and only chaotic clerics can make human sacrifices, something that would be restricted to EVIL characters in other alignment systems.

Don't get me wrong, I like ACKS in general, but it definitely seems to be backing one horse more than the other.

Hmmm. I wouldn't say that Chaos, as I've described it, is worse than Hitler. In fact, I'd say the Nazi regime was a Chaotic one.

- Nazi government was based on force and fear
- Nazism embraced genocide. The very word arose from Nazism's practices!
- Nazism embraced human sacrifice. To quote Nietzsche, "Mankind in the mass sacrificed to the prosperity of a single stronger species of man—that would be an advance." (See S. Hicks, "Nietzsche and the Nazis")
- Nazism embraced wanton destruction. "Nietzsche and the Nazis were in almost full agreement. Nietzsche praised war and urged its coming. He wished for a great purge that would wipe out most humans whose lives he thought worthless and an embarrassment to the human species. "All-too-many live, and all-too-long they hang on their branches. Would that a storm came to shake all this worm-eaten rot from the tree!" (S. Hicks)

- The Nazi ideal was "a brutal, domineering, fearless, cruel youth. Youth must be all that. It must bear pain. There must be nothing weak and gentle about it. The free, splendid beast of prey must once again flash from its eyes." This is the perfect description of a beastmen.

Perhaps the focus on cannibalism and necrophilia disguises this... It's not intended to be a checklist where if you ain't cannibalistic you ain't chaotic I just picked those as exemplary of behaviors against the norms of a Lawful civilization: eating the flesh of your species is unhealthy and unwholesome. Wasting your reproductive energies on the dead is not a healthy norm for a civilization.

Great discussion. So, a few notes.

First, I've written two extensive articles giving my thoughts on alignment. You can find them below:

<http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/columns/checkfortraps/8386...>

<http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/columns/checkfortraps/8436...>

With regard to those of you who have suggested that Chaos is Evil, I'd refer to my first article, "All About Alignment". What I discuss there is that the behavior you deem "evil" is going to depend on your ethical selection, which is itself a pre-ethical (meta-ethical) decision. The traditional 2-axis system is essentially written from the Lawful Good point of view, where Lawful Good closely maps to Kantianism.

Based on this reasoning, I decided not to use "good" and "evil" as the alignments in ACKS. I do not think the contemporary (21st century) usage of those terms is helpful in a game about adventuring, conquering, and kingship. Since most people, consciously or subconsciously, have taken the contemporary usage to heart, it creates a cognitive dissonance that's not helpful.

For instance, the prevailing morality in the contemporary West would not describe any of the following as good:

- Establishing a monarchy
- Putting enemy settlements to the torch
- Executing rebels
- Crusading against enemies of your god
- Accumulating vast wealth by conquering your realm's foes
- Killing rare animals for their body parts
- Exploring the tombs of other civilizations and taking their rarest relics back home

But all of the behaviors above are typical of heroes in the myths, legends, and heroes of the real world during the eras resembling ACKS. And all of them are certainly typical of characters in ACKS.

In "All About Alignment Part II," I mention "Alignment as Allegiance" as one simple method, and that's what I adopted in ACKS. While I offer a default set of allegiances based on vaguely Greco-Roman notions of civilization and chaos, the beauty of this system is that each Judge can choose for himself what the Allegiances are, and what being a member of those Allegiances stands for.

Sometimes the range of morality encompassed by the Allegiance can be very broad. The real-world example of the Axis & Allies in WWII is a good example. Everyone agrees that the Nazis were very evil. But were the Italian Fascist more evil than the Russian Stalinists? Meh... But the Fascists were Axis and the Stalinists were Allied, and that's what matters.

Magic Libraries, Workshops, Labs, and Crypts

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/magic-libraries-workshops-labs-and-crypts>

April 08, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Nerdnumber1 wrote:

I was looking at some of the magical research rules and had some questions I'd like semi-authoritative answers to.

- 1. Are libraries, workshops, labs, and crypts divided into arcane and divine, or can a mage use a cleric's library or lab and vice-versa (maybe some are separated like this and others aren't)?*
- 2. How many spell-casters can benefit from a library or lab or workshop at once? I'd think that the library at least could be used by a multitude of casters (hence why a guild might grant access to their large library), but a workshop or lab might be limited to just a mage and her apprentices working under her.*
- 3. How large/heavy is a library of a given value? At what point does it become impossible to transport unaided? by mule? by wagon?*
- 4. What, if anything, is stopping a group of mage/cleric PCs from pooling their resources into a giant library (or workshop, etc.)? I understand that pooling resources is the whole point of mage guilds, but it seems like it might skew power-by-level if a mage has access to a library 3x a large as they normally would have.*

jedavis then wrote:

3 seems deducible from the Mercantile rules, which put 'rare books' at 3 stone / 1000 gp. So at a wag I would rule that a wizard can carry around 6 or 7000gp of library at 30', a mule can carry around 13000gp of library at 60', and so forth.

As for 2, you could require them to partition the library's value between people using it concurrently?

And for 4, I wouldn't worry about it, but power-by-level isn't something I stress much over in any case. They're supposed to have X-ish gp at level n, and if they all spend it on library-stacking, that's money that isn't going somewhere else useful (like castles, mercenaries, funding actual research projects, or reserve XP). It's all fungible, and it'll work itself out.

1. Are libraries, workshops, labs, and crypts divided into arcane and divine, or can a mage use a cleric's library or lab and vice-versa (maybe some are separated like this and others aren't)?

APM: They are not divided unless the Judge feels a particular book or item has a worth to one type of research but not to the other. For example, "The Holy Sacrament of the Lion" might be worth 2,000gp to a divine caster but worthless to an arcane caster, while "The Undisclosed Secrets of Sorcery" might be the opposite.

2. How many spell-casters can benefit from a library or lab or workshop at once? I'd think that the library at least could be used by a multitude of casters (hence why a guild might grant access to their large library), but a workshop or lab might be limited to just a mage and her apprentices working under her.

APM: There's no official rule on this. I would allow the value of a library to be shared, while the value of a workshop would be divided by the number of (mage + apprentice) teams using it.

3. How large/heavy is a library of a given value? At what point does it become impossible to transport unaided? by mule? by wagon?

APM: As Jedavis pointed out, it's 3 stone / 1,000 gp.

4. What, if anything, is stopping a group of mage/cleric PCs from pooling their resources into a giant library (or workshop, etc.)? I understand that pooling resources is the whole point of mage guilds, but it seems like it might skew power-by-level if a mage has access to a library 3x as large as they normally would have.

APM: Nothing. They can and should do this. Note, however, that magical experimentation (per the Player's Companion) can be very damaging to a library or workshop...

Nerdnumber1 then wrote:

I'm figuring that library value is more a function of the texts contained within than the structure, so library building should only take the time to acquire the texts (bookshelves don't take long to make). That does still beg the question as to how much magical library material is available by market class. Workshops, labs, and crypts might be more like construction though...

I allow players to buy boxes of rare books on the Equipment Availability by Market Class table, priced as a 1000gp item. That will mean, e.g., 1 set of rare books per month in a Class III town. If they want more than that, they have to resort to the Mercantile system.

Copying Spells from Spellbook to Spellbook

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/copying-spells-spellbook-spellbook>

May 07, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Shieara wrote:

Hello! We have something of a debate going on in our campaign and I am hoping for an official answer. The question is:

Can a mage copy a spell from their spellbook to a captured spellbook or a blank one, thus creating a "backup copy" of formulas for spells. If their spellbook were destroyed, they would use the backup as a formula so they could add the spells to their repertoire without having to track down a bunch of other wizards to copy spells out of their books or completely recreate it from memory.

We know they would still need to spend the gold and the time to add them to their repertoire if the book was destroyed.

Sorry a fast addendum to this: Is your spellbook and your repertoire the same thing? I thought the book was just a list of different omens, starsigns, etc to track and your repertoire was which of those you were choosing to track to cast those specific spells.

This is not covered in the rules. It is up to the Judge to decide what is appropriate.

As Judge, I would allow the caster to make a backup spell book, under the following guidelines.

1. It takes one week to copy each spell into the spell book.
2. The backup spellbook needs to be scribed anew once the caster levels. Unlike his main spellbook it's not being actively maintained with metaphysical data.

If you get interrupted during copying, etc. you just resume where you left off.

Divine Healing (and healing potions) Progression

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/divine-healing-and-healing-potions-progression>

May 28, 2013

Tag: Q&A

James S wrote:

Howdy!

I'm doing some tinkering with Holy Water and Healing Potions and am curious about the progression of healing spells. The combined Core + PC healing spells give the following:

Cure Light Wounds - 1d6+1

Cure Moderate Wounds - 2d6

Cure Major Wounds - 2d6 + 1 per 2 levels

Cure Serious Wounds - 2d6 + 1 per level

Cure Critical Wounds - 4d6 + 1 per level

A potion of Extra Healing, which requires Cure Serious Wounds, will heal 3d6+3 hp.

What was the design choice in keeping 2d6 for Cure Major and Cure Serious? Why not go 1d6, 2d6, 3d6, 4d6, 5d6?

And why, in particular, does Cure Serious not heal 3d6+3 like the Extra Healing pot?

Are these legacy design choices from B/X or a deliberate choice on Alex's part?

When I was running the original Auran Empire campaign, I found that Cure Serious Wounds, as it appeared in B/X, was underpowered. It healed only 2d6+2 points of damage.

I noticed that the spell became available at 6th level, and that adding +1/level would be equal to approximately 4d6 at 6th level - 7th level, with increased benefit thereafter. So I settled on 2d6+1 per level.

When in Player's Companion I added Cure Moderate, Cure Major, and Cure Critical I wanted to work within the established framework. Cure Major also becomes available at 6th level (3rd level spell), and having it do +1/2 level means it heals on average 10 points, right around 3d6.

Spell Repertoire: Am I Reading This Right?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/spell-repertoire-am-i-reading-right>

September 01, 2012

Tag: Q&A

cr0m wrote:

I'm finally digging into my copy of ACKS and wondering if I understand the "free-casting" system.

A 1st level Mage can cast one 1st level spell. That's also the extent of his repertoire, unless he has bonus spells from high Int.

At 2nd level, he can cast two 1st level spells. That means that he can now have say, both Sleep and Charm Person in his repertoire. And he can also cast any combination of Sleep and Charm Person, twice per day. So he could cast two Sleeps on Monday, two Charm Persons on Tuesday, one of each on Wednesday, etc.

Is that about right? It's late and I've had a long week, so I suspect I'm missing something. If I'm not, it pays to have a high Int in the Auran Empire. :)

Old Gumphrey then wrote:

Furthering this:

"Their masters will teach them spells equal to the number and level of spells the caster can use in a single day."

Should this read "up to" or does a caster seriously get 1-4 new spells per spell level each time they level up?

The intent is that you get taught equal to the number and level of spells [a caster of ordinary intelligence] can use in a single day.

For example, let's say that you are a Mage of 18 INT advancing to 3rd level. You gain 1 2nd level spell per day. With 18 INT, your 2nd level repertoire is (1+3) 4 spells. Your master will teach you 1 spell. It's up to you to find a source for the other three spells.

Within the game-world, this simulates young apprentices of particular insight who "outrance" the curriculum.

Old Gumphrey then wrote:

So, it's "you get taught equal to the number and level of [NEW] spells a caster of ordinary INT can use in a single day?"

i.e. a mage traveling from 6th to 7th level would acquire one single 1st and 4th level spell from a master?

That's correct.

The ACKS rules are VERY clear as long as you add in all the missing words and implicit assumptions... :-D

Growth of Plants

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/growth-plants>

August 01, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

Ok...so how does this spell work. One of friends thinks a single bush should explode to fill the volume, while I read it to mean any vegetation already present becomes impassable (but a single tree in a dead field won't make the field impassable). Am I too harsh?

Interesting question.

I suppose if it was genuinely the case that the tree was the *only living thing* in the field then the spell might have trouble exploding to fill the volume, but usually there will be smaller plants, vines, clover, weeds, etc.

In any event, leaving aside the ecological question, certainly the intent of the spell is that if you cast it outdoors in anything except a desert or wasteland, you'll get the full volume. The requirement of having there be plants present is to make it not useful inside dungeons and buildings.

Tywyll then wrote:

Ok, fair enough. What about in a settlement or well trodden keep parade ground? That's really the crux...I envision that sort of area as being effectively plant free despite the occasional bit of grass clinging to a cobblestone or at the edge of the parade ground. That's the bone of contention. Otherwise places where any planting has been trodden to death (speaking of which...dead plants aren't viable, right?).

Beyond that I'm all for an outside/inside divide.

I think I'd go with the intent of the keep owner. If he has purposefully said, "I'm worried about Growth of Plants", and deliberately makes sure that no growing things exist on the parade ground, then it makes sense to forbid Growth of Plants. This would be similar to how guards will burn away all vegetation around a keep to ensure there's no cover for enemy.

On the other hand, a typical parade ground of a typical keep is probably not so well-policed.

About the Sleep Saving Throw

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/about-sleep-saving-throw>

August 19, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Ahskar wrote:

Hi,

The Sleep spell doesn't specify any saving throw. Is that correct?

I mean, in the charm spells there is a saving throw vs spells, and I think is a bit shocking there isn't a saving throw for this spell.

thanks

If you consult the Player's Companion, you'll note that Sleep costs 28 points to build; it's equivalent to a 3rd level spell.

Sleep: Sleep targets (15), target 1 creature of up to 4+1 HD or 2d8 HD of creatures up to 4HD (x2.3), creatures must be living (x0.75), creatures with fewest HD affected first (x0.75), range 240' (x1.25), duration 4d4 turns (x1.2), no saving throw (x1), total cost 28

So if you find it more powerful than other 1st level spells, that's because it is.

If you find Sleep too powerful for your campaign, here is a reduced-strength version:

Slumber: Sleep targets (15), target 1 creature of up to 4+1 HD or 2d8 HD of creatures up to 4HD (x2.3), creatures with fewest HD affected first (x0.5), range 60' (x1), duration 12 rounds (x1.15), saving throw avoids spell effect (x0.5), total cost 9.9 = 1st level

This spell retains the dramatic "nuke" capability of classic D&D's Sleep, but it has shorter range and duration and permits a saving throw.

Web Spell

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/web-spell>

August 24, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Ahskar wrote:

The Web Spell says the creatures affected "can't move". So, I have some question about it. Is you are affected:

Can you attack?

Can you cast spells?

Can you use a Shield (gaining the bonus to your AC)?

Have your enemies any Attack bonus (like when you are fallen on the ground)?

When a creature is Webbed, it:

- cannot attack
- cannot cast spells without Quiet Magic
- will be automatically hit in combat
- is susceptible to backstab
- can use command words and at-will magical powers
- can talk

Spell Categories - An Exercise

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/spell-categories-exercise>

September 27, 2013

Tag: Q&A

James S wrote:

As an exercise in curiosity (and with a possible view to some further analysis), I've started a spreadsheet that categorizes each spell in Core and the PC into one of the 11 types Alex describes in the PC.

Extracting this info for most of them is fairly straightforward, and I'm left with about 60 that I'm not so sure about.

I thought I'd crowdsource!

If anyone cares to take a look, stick an X in the relevant column for any spell that has a red cell at the end of the row (and feel free to review anything that's already been done - I may have screwed up)

The link is here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/cc?key=0Ah7HGPHwVxS5dFBZajJLTkUzcWM...>

Per my design records, these are the spells I was unable to officially categorize using the Player's Companion.

They do fall into some loose and unofficial categories, noted below.

"Informative Spells That Ruin Your Campaign's Mysteries"

Read Languages

ESP

Clairvoyance

Clairaudience

Telepathy

Contact Other Plane

Commune

Wizard Eye

"Environmental Spells That Are Really Useful on the Battlefield"

Control Weather

Lower Water

Move Earth

Control Wind

Summon Weather

Call Lightning

Passwall

Produce Fire

[I almost got these to working in a category called "manipulations" but it didn't come together]

"Tesla-Edison Memorial Spells That if Unchecked Lead to Electric Lighting"

Light

Continual Light

"Spells That No One Would Memorize Under Vancian Casting But Which Are Now Super Useful To Know in ACKS"

Knock

Hold Portal

Floating Disc

Spell Storing

Magic Jar

Glitterdust

Adaptation

Enchanted Container

X-Ray Vision

"Overpowered Spells that Destroy NPC Main Villains A Lot"

Dispel Evil

"Spells That Stack With Bard Inspire Courage And Result In Lots of Low-Level Monsters Being Cleaved"

Bless

Holy Chant

Prayer

"Powerful Ritual Spells I Thought Were Cool"

Undead Legion

Life Trapping

Longevity

Temp Stasis

Opposition

Miracle

Life Trapping

Forbiddance

Cancellation

Cataclysm

Plague

Spell Turning

Magic Carpet - Movement

Strength of Mind - Protection

Striking - Transmogrification

Swift Sword - Movement

koewn then wrote:

Transmogrification can be refreshingly versatile if you paint with a broad brush - Wizard Lock is a good example; you've changed the door into a door which is magically locked. It's "dumb", but it works for a lot of things (Pass Without Trace is another one like that, but could also be Enchantment)

Faerie Fire ought to be whatever Light/Continual Light are, I'd think.

Feign Death and Speak with Dead; I'd vote for the traditional Necromancy.

Uncanny Gyration - Movement?

Other votes: Atonement = Healing; Right. Wrath = Enchantment; Vigor = Enchantment.

Web as a Wall spell is genius, I wouldn't have thought of that.

moorcrys then wrote:

Personally I think the spell creation rules are awesome for most standard effects, but if you have to bend over backward to try and jam it into a coded language, you might as well eyeball it and balance it with other spells available at the same level for the class.

Part of what I enjoy about a bunch of old school spells from AD&D and 2nd edition is the fact that there were some really weird effects that were heavy on imagination but not necessarily easily broken down into a set formula of rules. I think Alex handles this in ACKS with the idea of spell breakthroughs. The spells (fireball, sleep) don't completely fit in the spell creation formula, so the formula allows for some rules-breaking to make the overall system work.

Transmogrification does work well as a general utility category for a wide variety of spell effects. Its range, duration, and save modifiers are fairly neutral (unlike, say, blast effects, which skew towards cheap range but costly duration).

That said, keep in mind that the spell categorization system is a reverse-engineering of 30 years of tradition. There are some spells I simply could not figure out how to fit into it. At a certain point I reached diminishing returns - adding a particular spell simply made the system too complex to be worthwhile.

Moorcys is 100% right that you can and should use spell breakthrough rules to explain and justify these unusual spells. It's completely fine to just say "this effect can only be gained with a radical breakthrough" or whatever. That's definitely how I envision WISH.

Polymorphing Undead

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/polymorphing-undead>

November 25, 2013

Tag: Q&A

DrSkull wrote:

Here's a thing. Last session out enchanter used a wand of polymorphing to turn a hostile ghoul into an Elf.

As a quick ruling, I ruled that "Steve the Elf" decided to join the party against the remaining ghouls and continued to accompany them until he was killed by some lizards later.

Is it really kosher to polymorph an undead creature into a living creature (provided it was a corporeal undead of course)? If so, does that then become a means of re-animating an undead comrade (at least until he hits a dispel magic)? Could one make a mindless skeleton into a trusty dwarf?

No, you can't polymorph undead and constructs.

The spell description states "this spell allows the caster to change one target into another form of living creature". While this is very clumsily written, the phrase "another form of living creature" was meant to suggest that the target has to be a living creature. Moreover, dead creatures revert to their original form.

This is explicit in Player's Companion, which shows the point build for polymorph:

- Polymorph Other: Transform to living creature's physical form (35), gain form's physical characteristics (10), gain form's physical attacks (10), and gain form's special abilities (20) (75 total), mental characteristics replaced by new form's (x0.2), HD limited to caster level and 2 x target's level (x0.75), target living corporeal creature (x1), range 60' (x1), duration indefinite (x3.5), saving throw avoids spell effect (x1), arcane (x1), total cost 39

A polymorph that is capable of affecting undead would be x1.25 more expensive.

Magic Carpet Spell

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/magic-carpet-spell>

December 05, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Tywyll wrote:

So does the caster of this spell have to ride the carpet to control it? That was kind of my interpretation since there is no range on it. One of my players read it That the caster could control the carpet from the ground.

What's the intent? If he's right, how far away can the creator be and must they have line of sight?

The creator needs to pilot it.

12-Hour “Days?”

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/12-hour-days>

December 06, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

wamba_the_fool wrote:

Regarding spellcaster spells per day. If I get a good 8 hours of sleep, spend my one hour studying, and blow all my spells-per-day in 3 hours of adventuring, can I then take an 8-hour nap and start the cycle all over again?

This seems to me to be against the intent of the rules, but I haven't found anything that refers specifically to 24-hour or sunrise/sunset cycles.

I can't be the only one who's thought of this - any insights, O wise and ever-helpful denizens?

No, that's not the intent. That ruling transforms mages into hibernating animals that are awake for only 4 hours out of every 24.

The intent is that you can only benefit from resting once every 24 hours.

Summoning Creatures With More Than 3 Special Powers

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/summoning-creatures-more-3-special-powers>

June 03, 2014

Tag: **Q&A**

golan2072 wrote:

I want to create spells to summon beings with over 3 special powers. Companion p.122 lists only a maximum of 3 powers. What would be the cost for, say, 5 powers?

x3 for 4

x3.66 for 5

x4.33 for 6

x5 for 7

Trance Spell Question

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/trance-spell-question>

June 11, 2014

Tag: **Q&A**

Tywyll wrote:

Does the Trance Spell detect cursed items? That's how it gets regularly used in my game which seems to make cursed magic items pointless. It strikes me as maybe that isn't right since the Detect Curse spell is higher level.

Or have I been doing this actually RAI?

IIRC, Trance was a spell inspired by a B/X spell found in a Gazetteer, rather than one I built using the Player's Companion. I don't think it's well-balanced. I'd probably remove some of its functions if I did it over again.

Restore Life and Limb Questions

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/restore-life-and-limb-questions>

June 26, 2014

Tag: Q&A

susan_brindle wrote:

1. Does Restore Life and Limb restore both limbs and life in one go? IE: Dave the Fighter loses his eyes in a fight against an ogre. In a subsequent fight, he loses the rest of his head. The party pools their money to revive him- is he restored to mint condition? (I'm assuming that RL&L heals injuries; otherwise your companion who was reduced to red mist will be revived as red mist)

2. Does using Restore Life and Limb provoke a Tampering with Mortality roll when used on the living?

On one hand, this provides a disincentive towards overuse of RL&L (Because otherwise, with its low gp cost, we end up with a world where "realistically" almost no one should ever be blind or crippled.)

On the other hand, it seems pretty clear from the table results that the assumption is that you're dead.

1. Yes, but be sure to factor in ALL the cumulative damage the character's body has taken. For example, if Dave loses his left hand in a fight; then loses his right eye; and then is beheaded, his total penalty will be -1 (hand) -1 (eye) -5 (severed spine) = -7.

2. Yes. But the cleric will begin with a minimum +4 bonus (1/2 his level, minimum 7th level). There will be no penalty from time of death, and no penalty for instantly killed, just the penalty for limbs and hand/feet/etc. In most cases you'll be at a net positive, so the worst case is a month of bed rest. I didn't quite make the math work out such that it's impossible to get 0 or less, but if that does occur, then the spell has no effect. (It ought to read "The spell fails to restore your life or limb".)

Note that if you play it straight, many of the results of Tampering With Morality are simply awful, and most sane, normal people would prefer the permanent wound instead, and maybe even prefer their loved one stay dead. In the Auran Empire and Opelenean Nights campaign, many characters restored to life ended up retiring to monasteries to live out leper-like existences because their fates were so horrid.

Most of the time, characters are better off accepting small permanent wounds (scars, lost fingers, damaged knees and hips) because it's not worth the risk of Tampering With Morality. Only characters who lose one or more limbs, or are blinded or paralyzed, are better off going for a Restoration of Life and Limb.

We had one beautiful Elven Spellsword who refused to have a Restore until she lost both hands and her tongue, making her utterly incapable of fighting or spellcasting...

susan_brindle then wrote:

Oh, one more question- Are RL&L's effects cumulative? What sorts of things undo them?

That is, could you end up with someone who has been revived many times, and is thus afflicted with a turbobead, who can't ride horses, glows like a candle to the undead, has a unicorn left leg, etc?

Yes! The system is designed such that characters who have been through more than a few restorations become very warped...

The results are not only cumulative - each side effect imposes a cumulative -1 penalty on FUTURE RL&L rolls too, making it more likely you'll have even worse effects next time you are raised.

It is entirely possible to be suffering from a variety of side effects, some of which can stack in dreadful ways. For instance, one character in my home campaign suffered:

"Your renewed body needs energy that plants and mushrooms cannot provide. All rations must contain meat."

and

"Meat is too much like murder. You may only eat plants, mushrooms and herbs. The taste of flesh makes you vomit."

The character starved to death.

There is no mechanical means within the rules to remove the side effects of RL&L. You could allow Wish or Miracle to do so. In some campaigns I have placed "cleansing shrines" in rare and hard-to-get locations in the world which allow a character to bathe and purify himself of any side effects.

Summoned Creature Initiative

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/summoned-creature-initiative>

July 15, 2014

Tag: **Q&A**

Boomishtendency wrote:

My players and I recently came to a situation where a player used summon berserkers. A question came up of whether the Berserkers are rolled into the current initiative or wait until the following initiative roll. Any help?

Creatures which require concentration by the caster directly (elementals) act on the caster's initiative. Other creatures act on their own initiative.

The berserkers begin acting the round after they are summoned.

Arcane Repertoire Management

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/arcane-repertoire-management>

July 25, 2014

Tag: Q&A

nDervish wrote:

I've read and re-read the "Adding New Spells to the Repertoire" section on ACKS Core p.67 several times, and every time I read it, it seems to say:

- Adding a new spell to your repertoire takes a flat 1 week of study and costs no gold if you have an empty slot available for it.

- Replacing an existing spell in your repertoire with a different spell takes 1 week per spell level and costs 1,000gp per spell level.

Is this accurate?

If so, what's the logic behind it? It seems to me that it's essentially saying that adding a spell is quick and costs nothing, but removing it takes up extra time and money, which doesn't seem right.

First, let us acknowledge that this one of the more "gamey" rules in ACKS. It is intended, in play, to allow a mage PC to easily and cheaply utilize a fixed repertoire, but to make it expensive and time-consuming to frequently change their repertoire, without making it impossible. It's thus mid-way between 3.5 Sorcerers and Wizards - the former who could never change their repertoire, and the latter who could change it daily from an unlimited-size spellbook.

That said, what does it mean in-world to say that you have an empty slot in your repertoire? It depends on how your Judge has interpreted what it means to have a spell in your repertoire of spell slots in the first place.

Having a spell in your repertoire of spell slots might simply be a matter of mental capacity (memory). If so, gaining an empty slot means that your mind has expanded and is ready to learn; in which case not having an empty slot means that the learning a new spell is a torturous and difficult process that involves much wasted ink, reagents, lab time, etc.

Having a spell in your repertoire of spell slots might represent the favor of spiritual allies who actually maintain certain arcane connections on your behalf. If so, gaining an empty slot means that you have acquired a new spiritual ally who will maintain another connection; not having an empty slot means that you have to dismiss an old ally and then bribe a new one to appear.

Having a spell in your repertoire of spell slots might represent performing certain oaths and vows before the occult powers. If so, gaining an empty slot means that your iron will and power enable you to undertake more such commitments; not having an empty slot means that you have to make sacrifices to the occult powers to release you from older vows in order to make new ones.

I hope that helps.

Alter Self Limb Replacement?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/alter-self-limb-replacement>

July 30, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

Can you use Alter Self to replace a missing limb or tongue or whatever temporarily?

I have always ruled that Alter Self does not allow you to change your number of limbs.

Therefore if you lost a hand as a human male, and altered-self to be an elven female, you'd be a one-handed elven female.

Nerdnumber1 then wrote:

How about these questions:

1)What if you had the arm, but lacked the hand at the end? Perhaps you could make a non-functional pseudo-hand? A man who lost a hand still has 2 arms, one is just a bit less useful. (I assume a leg/foot situation would be similar.)

2)What if you just lacked some digits, either because you lost a couple or just naturally had fewer fingers?

3) What about other missing/damaged bits like a missing eye or bad foot? I could see 3 likely possibilities: a)you maintain your disfigurement, b) you become whole for the duration of the spell, or c) you maintain the penalties (save for aesthetic ones) but form non-functional versions of things like eyes, etc. so you can lose the eyepatch, but still have problems with depth perception.

1) I concur.

2) I'd still have the fingers be missing.

3) I would go either with (a) or (c). Either one seems perfectly fine and reasonable to me.

Possible Reincarnate Nerfs?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/possible-reincarnate-nerfs>

November 09, 2014

Tag: Q&A

susan_brindle wrote:

So, my players have used Reincarnate a number of times already, and I'm beginning to feel that it's too available. 4500 isn't cheap, but being dead is even more expensive. If somebody's saved up 10,000, they're only halfway to a borderlands stronghold, but they can already afford two reincarnates. It seems like everyone over level 6 should be able to afford reincarnate, which grants a return from death 100% of the time.

I was curious how the boards felt about this, and what sort of concepts people had?

So far, I've had the core concepts of either:

Limit Reincarnation by adding risk: Where Restore Life and Limb is safer or more dangerous based on a number of factors, Reincarnate might offer a flat risk. IE: Flat 10% chance of permadeath, coming back evil, etc.

Limit Reincarnation by making it less useful: IE: Maybe you can't be reincarnated more than once a decade, or there's a percent chance you won't reincarnate on the spot, leaving the party to try to find where in the world (Or when! Maybe it takes a couple months sometimes) you've popped up.

I have run into this problem in my own campaigns. I didn't see it in the initial Auran Empire campaign (my PCs didn't figure it out, for whatever reason) so it slipped past me in playtesting. In the Opelenean Nights campaign, however, when Shamans were common, there was a LOT of Reincarnation happening.

I'll certainly use some variant rule next time I run. Maybe:

1. Whatever you died as becomes your new "base class" for the next casting of the spell. Imagine a human fighter who died and reincarnated as a roc. Now he dies again and is reincarnated. His base form is roc. It's not that you are "really" a human fighter - the whole point is that the individual lifetime is just one instance of some underlying soul-stuff.
2. Each subsequent reincarnation after the first within X time (say 1 year) drops you by one level as your past life becomes increasingly distant and dream-like or as your soul suffers from re-shuffling (or whatever).

Chapter 6: Adventures

Surprise Question

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/surprise-question>

May 21, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

CelticTony wrote:

On page 97 of the ACKS rulebook it says that surprised characters lose any shield benefit to AC for the surprise round. Should lose the AC bonus from high DEX as well?

This is discussed in detail in this thread:

<http://www.autarch.co/comment/5035>

The short answer: Yes, a character's DEX bonus still applies to AC if they are surprised. In ACKS your Dexterity doesn't modify your CHANCE of being surprised, but in recompense we allow it to still apply to your AC when surprised.

In short, characters with fast reflexes can still be caught off-guard, but if they are caught off guard they start to recover faster, so they get their AC bonus.

Triggering Traps

<http://autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/triggering-traps>

June 11, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

So, what's the deal with traps triggering on a 2 in 6?

Are traps just inherently unreliable, such that stepping on the pressure-plate just doesn't always work? The trap triggers when you open the door... except most of the time it doesn't?

Or should it be reserved for "I can't tell exactly what you're doing, so maybe you trigger the trap"? Like a bunch of people walk over a tripwire, but it's possible that they'll just accidentally step over it?

It's not clear from the text. Is it a 4 in 6 chance of trap failure, or 2 in 6 chance of "stepping in the wrong place"?

Ludanto, I generally use the random chances as representative of "the average situation in which the adventurers act typically but not exceptionally." This applies to searching for secret doors, stumbling into traps, etc.

Some examples:

#1) If the party is marching at exploration movement down a dungeon corridor, in a standard marching order, the chances of triggering the pit are 2 in 6 per person. (The trap mechanism is old, it's specifically designed for a certain weight). But if the party had yoked a 800lb ox marching in front of them, the Judge could rule the ox automatically triggered a normal pit. Or, imagine there's no ox, but the pit was designed with a "hair trigger" and takes up the entire width of the corridor, the Judge could rule that the trap is triggered on a 5 in 6 per person.

#2) If the party is marching at exploration movement down a dungeon corridor, in a standard marching order, the chances of triggering a tripwire are 2 in 6 per person. But if the party were all using levitate spells to palm their way across the ceiling, the Judge could rule that the trip is triggered on only a 1 in 6 (maybe rope dangles out of a pack or something). On the other hand, if the party were sprinting down the hall, the Judge could rule the trap is triggered on a 4 in 6 per person (or whatever).

Hope that makes sense.

Character Death, XP Reserve

<http://autarch.co/forums/house-rules/character-death-xp-reserve>

June 05, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Cameron wrote:

So. My current campaign has had two PC deaths in fairly short order (almost one a session), and players are starting to look at blowing cash to set up an XP reserve.

I'm planning to tell them to not bother, and just institute a house rule that new characters come in with half the XP of the departed character.

But this brings up a question for me: are the treasure allotments based around the idea that PCs will spend 35% of their wealth on reserve XP?

If so, I may need to massage the wealth tables and XP-per-gold. If not (if the reserve XP is just an add-on rule and not part of the treasure-per-level balancing act), then I can just run things as normal.

Removing Reserve XP won't materially affect the economics in the long-term, as spending on Reserve XP tends to drop dramatically at 7th level, when Restore Life and Limb becomes available.

That said, I'd encourage you to leave the system in, because it is a very valuable role-playing stimulus. In our playtest campaigns, reserve XP has been spent on:

- Huge gambling events at the Thieves' Guild
- Building a huge series of statues of the adventurers in the town square
- A welfare program for indigent peasants similar to the Salvation Army
- Hiring an entire brothel for a night's entertainment
- Endowing the local Tower of Knowledge to research particular topics

And more. It's a wonderful way to give a small in-game benefit for cash that otherwise would just be hoarded.

Abstracting Missile Attacks

<http://autarch.co/forums/house-rules/abstracting-missile-attacks>

June 21, 2012

Tag: **New Material**

Alex wrote:

The Problem

One of the long-standing criticisms of D20-style combat is that melee attacks are abstract, while missile attacks are concrete. That is to say, each melee attack throw actually represents the best attack of several abstracted thrusts, slashes, and ripostes. However, each missile attack represents one, specific, missile being fired - which must be tracked on an arrow-for-arrow (or bolt-for-bolt, sling stone-for-stone) basis. This "concreteness" poses a problem for the otherwise abstract system of rounds, hit points, cures, and so on.

Solution

Each missile attack actually represents some abstract number of missile shots. It might be 1, it might be 2, it might be 0 (you didn't get an opening). Since the number of attacks is abstracted, so too is ammunition. Ammunition is now recorded in bundles of 20: A quiver of 20 arrows, a case of 20 bolts, or a bag of 20 sling stones. Whenever a missile attacker rolls a natural "1" on his attack throw, it means he has expended all of his available ammunition in that quiver/case/bag.

EXAMPLE: Marcus is carrying a longbow and a quiver with 20 arrows. He is sniping from a castle wall at invading goblins. Over a series of rounds, he makes attack throws. Occasionally he hits, kills, and cleaves, taking additional attack throws. On the 6th round, his attack throw is a natural 1. Marcus has now used up his ammunition.

Handling Magic Arrows

The first issue that arose in play-testing was how to handle magical arrows, which come in small numbers and can't be readily replaced. The solution is that magical arrows come in bundles. There are four bundle sizes: Large, Medium, Small, or Tiny. Those correlate to finding 3d10, 2d6, 1d6, and 1d4 magical arrows on the treasure tables. (Note that what applies to arrows also would apply to, e.g. magic bolts, magic stones, etc.)

Large Bundle: You run out of magical arrows if you make a natural attack throw of "1-2".

Med. Bundle: You run out of magical arrows if you make a natural attack throw of "1-3".

Small Bundle: You run out of magical arrows if you make a natural attack throw of "1-6".

Tiny Bundle: You run out of magical arrows if you make a natural attack throw of "1-8".

EXAMPLE: On the wall, Marcus sees an ogre chieftain and his thanes approaching. He procures his Medium Bundle of Arrows +2 and begins to fire them. His first attack throw is an 11, a hit! Next round, he gets an 8, a miss! The third round, a 14, a hit! The fourth round, a 12, a hit! The fifth round, he rolls a 2. He misses, and has used up his Medium Bundle of Arrows +2.

I'd be highly interested in the results of playtest by anyone who tries this system.

Secret Doors, Elves, and Casual Inspection

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/secret-doors-elves-and-casual-inspection>

June 24, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Malo Monkey wrote:

I have some confusion about how Elves casual inspection is supposed to work.

On page 93 of ACKS, the third paragraph has the sentence, "Secret doors can only be spotted if characters are specifically looking for them." Later in the same paragraph there is a sentence regarding Elves, "Elves have keen eyes that allow them to detect hidden and secret doors with a proficiency throw of 8+ on 1d20 when actively searching, or 14+ on casual inspection."

I know that active searching involves searching the 10'x10' area where the secret door is located for 1 turn in order to locate it. What does Casual Inspection entail and how long does it take?

Does it mean that the elf is still taking a turn to search that area, but can be doing other things actively as well?

Does it mean that if they simply walk through that 10'x10' square they get an automatic chance to spot the secret door without even trying?

Or perhaps it means something else?

Thanks in advance for the clarification.

It means that if they simply walk through that 10'x10' square they get an automatic chance to spot the secret door without even trying.

XP Weirdness

<http://autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/xp-weirdness>

July 02, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Mr. Grogg wrote:

I'm finally sitting down and studying the core rulebook for the first time in preparation for a new campaign. I noticed two very odd rules concerning experience points, and wanted to hear what others thought of them. (The forum search feature is apparently broken at the moment, so please forgive me if these have already been done to death.)

The first is this paragraph:

If the party recovers magic items on an adventure, and sells them without using them, they receive 1XP per 1gp earned in the sale. If the characters use the magic items, they do not get any XP, even if they later sell them. (This is to prevent characters from using magic items to help them adventure, then selling the magic items for XP later, essentially benefiting twice from the same item.)

Here's what I imagine a player doing with that: "Oh, cool! I found a nifty magic ring worth 10000gp! I'll sell it to this merchant here, and get 10000gp and 10000xp! Yay! Now I'm rich AND more experienced! Hey, I could really use a magic ring, and I've got 10000gp burning a hole in my pocket. Not only that, but I happen to know a merchant who has a ring just like the one I want! He bought it this morning from a guy who happens to be me! Boom! Now I've got a nifty ring AND more experience. I love this game!"

(Yeah, I know: You can't sell something for the same amount it costs you to buy it. But the point is that even losing a substantial portion of the gold, the XP is there for the munchkinning.)

The second oddness is this paragraph:

XP is divided only among characters alive when the party returns to civilization, even if other characters were alive when the monsters were slain or the treasure was first found. Characters that are slain on an adventure, but are raised from the dead while still in the dungeon or wilderness, and are alive to return to civilization, do get XP.

So the party slays a whole family of dragons, not to mention a bazillion other creatures that stood between them and the dragons. They hauled away all the treasure their carts could carry, and they all lived. Joe the Strong really took a lot of damage, though, and they're fresh out of healing. On the way home, half a mile from the edge of the wilderness, there's a random encounter with a single goblin during which the goblin gets lucky and takes Joe's last hit point. The goblin is thrashed by the rest of the party, but good 'ol Joe dies an ignominious death.

The party has a choice: Continue half a mile into town and pay a cleric to cast Restore Life & Limb, in which case Joe is robbed of all his experience from the adventure; or sit and wait until a passerby can be sent as a messenger into town to go get a cleric to come out and cast the same spell on the side of the road, allowing Joe to get his well-deserved experience.

How does that make any sense?

This approach only works if the Judge ignores everything in the rules about buying and selling magic items. To wit, Adventurers can sell identified magic items found, discovered, looted, or otherwise acquired for the base cost to make the item. Adventurers can buy magic items for twice the base cost to make the item. In order to buy and sell magic items, the adventurer must be in a market of sufficient size. Assuming a ring of 10,000gp, in an average Class III town, there is a 25% chance to find a buyer per month, and then a 25% chance to find a seller per month. By the time the PC has sold his item, 2-3 months have passed, which represents 3-5 adventures in game-time. Then before he can buy a new one, another 2-3 months have passed. So after 3-6 months, the PC has lost 5,000gp and the use of a valuable magic item for 6-10 adventures. That's not a great trade in most ACKS campaigns, because the value of gold diminishes in value as you level.

To be clear, you are critiquing the metaphysics by which pieces of metal turn into skill and knowledge because the pieces of metal don't turn into skill and knowledge for dead people? I shall endeavor to answer this. :-|

First, let's look at why you get XP for gold in the first place. ACKS awards XP for GP because doing so creates incentives to explore rather than fight monsters; because it creates an easy way for Judges to spread "XP packets" throughout their sandbox; and because it allows us to tie increases in character power with increases in temporal power. But in order for XP for gold to make sense, it has to be tied to *successful* exploration.

So the question becomes, has a character succeeded if he died? As might be apparent from the horrors of the Tampering With Mortality table, ACKS does not subscribe to the view that dying and be restored to life is the same as not dying at all. In fact, dying is meant to be horrific and terrible in ACKS. In our playtest campaign, PCs are frequently retired because of the awful things they slowly become from repeated Restoration of Life and Limb. Not getting XP is part of the penalty for dying.

In the case you mention, should the cleric come from town to raise the fighter - and there's no in-game rule that says he would -- the fighter would have a penalty on his Tampering With Mortality roll because he's not being raised in a temple. So the trade-off is not so simple as "wait to get XP v. go into town". The real choice is whether the fighter's short-term loss of XP is worth the long-term cost to his body and soul.

Finally, it's worth adding, that if you use the rules-as-written, ACKS is a brutal game. A heroic fighter really might die while on the escape from a dungeon and lose all his XP. In this sense, ACKS can have more of a Joe Abercrombie / George RR Martin in feel than some people like, and I reckon many people probably house-rule it to soften the painful blows.

Climbing

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/climbing>

April 25, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Irda Ranger wrote:

Searching the PDF, I cannot find any rules for how non-thieves can climb stuff. But the character sheet has a "climb movement rate".

Was there an oversight somewhere?

Adventuring proficiency would cover all forms of climbing that are short of Mountaineering or scaling sheer surfaces. For example, climbing up a rope. A character would climb at their climbing movement rate.

The "120' per turn" movement rate must rank up there as one of the most misunderstood elements of D&D since hit points. The human movement rate of 120' per turn is quite realistic in the context of *exploration*.

You can empirically verify this. Go to a store with interesting merchandise (B&N, for instance). Monitor your speed of movement as you walk through the store. Given a 40' x 40' store, with a perimeter of 120', it will take at least 10 minutes. If shopping doesn't convince you, consider your rate of movement through a museum or art gallery, etc. That's exploration speed.

If the adventurers are crossing through areas they have already traversed, not concerned with noise or traps, and aren't mapping, they shouldn't be moving at exploration speed.

The rules state "Thieves climb at $\frac{1}{4}$ their standard combat movement rate." While correct insofar as combat movement, the rule seems to imply that combat movement is the only available movement when climbing, which is not the intent.

Climbing speed is intended to be at 25% of normal movement rate, whatever movement is being engaged in. A moment's reflection will reveal why this must be so; obviously, there must be some rate at which a thief climbs if he is fighting with 1 hand or foot, and another rate if he's climbing all-out, and a third rate if he's cautiously climbing a long distance, taking care to be relatively quiet and probing along the way.

For an unarmored human, the combat movement rate is 40' per round in indoors and 40 yards per round outdoors. The running/charging movement rate is 120' per round indoors and 120 yards per round outdoors.

A thief therefore moves 10' per round indoors if he's "combat climbing" and 30' per round indoors if he's "running up the walls" (e.g. climbing to the exclusion of all other activities). A thief who is "climbing all out" can move 30' per round indoors and 30 yards per round outdoors. That seems fast! But it's not implausible. In a recent Rockmaster World Championship, the world champion climbed a 25 meter rock wall in 6.3 seconds. That works out to 4 meters per second for a master climb. 4 meters per second translates to 43 yards per 10-second combat round.

Meanwhile, 1.53 meters per second on a climbing wall was (according to sources I consulted) a decent rate for a good climber. 1.53 meters per second is 1.67 yards per second or 17 yards per 10-second combat round. If you average these two values, you get $(17 \text{ yards/round} + 43 \text{ yards/round} = 60 \text{ yards/round} / 2 =) 30 \text{ yards per combat round}$, which is what ACKS assigns to a thief climbing outdoors.

In a dungeon, where the walls are likely smoother and wetter than an outdoor rock-face, the climbing rate will be much less. And a character who is combat climbing will obviously be much less than that.

Related topics:

The world record for swimming is 5.34 mph for 100 meters; or 26.6 yards per 10 seconds. For long distances, it is about 3 mph. ACKS movement rates for all-out swimming ($120\text{y} / \text{round} / 4 = 30 \text{ yards per combat round}$) are therefore world-class.

The world record for running is 34 feet per second, or 113 yards per combat round. ACKS (and D&Ds) running/charging movement rate outdoors is therefore faster than today's fastest humans.

I wouldn't let the fact that ACKS assumes peak 21st century human-performance levels for adventurers bother you, though. The book *Manthropology* does a brilliant (and depressing) job showing that in virtually every area of human physique, modern humans are slower and weaker than our ancestors raised under more primitive conditions. Olympic rowers cannot achieve galley speeds routinely achieved by Greek rowers. Olympic sprinters in high-tech shoes on rubber tracks cannot achieve running speeds of hunter-gathers racing barefoot in the mud. Great book.

Casting and Withdrawing in PBP

<http://autarch.co/forums/house-rules/casting-and-withdrawing-pbp>

July 11, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

I don't know if this will help anybody, but I'm trying to run an ACKs game in a forum, a medium which is notoriously slooooooooooow.

Anyway, you're supposed to declare casting or retreating or withdrawing before initiative, but in a forum (at least the one I frequent) that's essentially a waste of a day.

So what I've decided is that if you want to cast or withdraw on your turn, you roll initiative again, but keep the lower result. Maybe you get lucky and there's no effect. Maybe you roll much lower than your first roll, and the enemy piles on you. Or maybe your roll was already low.

I suppose I could just ignore the rule, but this seems like a decent compromise. The "advantage" you get from stealth-casting on a low initiative is offset by the fact that you'll rarely cast on a high initiative, and if you try, everybody knows about it.

Anyway, just an idea.

I think that's a great solution.

If you want to stick with a single initiative roll, you might impose a -1 penalty to initiative for each level of the spell. The spell is "in the process of being cast" during that time period.

Example:

JUDGE: Initiative 4! Mage is up.

MAGE: I cast Fireball at the approaching goblins. It'll deal 6d6 damage.

JUDGE: OK! The fireball will go off on Initiative 1. Initiative 3 is up. Initiative 3 is my Evil Cleric. He's going to hurl a sling at the mage to try to interrupt the Fireball....

XP Division When Selling Magical Items

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/xp-division-when-selling-magical-items>

August 13, 2012

Tag: Q&A

James S wrote:

I have a completely hypothetical situation... :)

Lets say that the party thief has managed to find a valuable magic item worth, say, 15,000 gp.

Instead of using it, he decides to sell it and goes through the appropriate motions of finding a buyer.

However, he's kept this all very quiet from the rest of the party.

Given the thief hasn't used the item, he can benefit from the XP gained from selling it. Is this xp shared among the whole party (because they were all present when it was looted, and all contributed to the fight in which it was taken) or does the thief get it all, because he's the one doing the selling?

I'm inclined to split it, but it leaves a question among the other players of where all this extra xp just came from (of course, the thief gets to keep all the money).

Any thoughts how to handle this better/differently?

Tywyll then wrote:

I think the text as written indicates that xp is earned from treasure the group brings back from the wilds. Since it is part of the treasure the group brought back the other characters should get a share. If you don't want to give it away you could fold it into their next reward or lie and say it was a story award or something. Or spread it over several adventures. Maybe just tell the players and expect them to keep ooc info out of character?

As Tywyll said, according to the rules as written, since its part of the treasure the group brought back, the other characters should all get a share. This is something of an event horizon where the "XP for treasure" abstraction starts to break down.

Leaving the text of the rules aside for the moment, I'd recommend that how you handle be determined by the social dynamics of your player group.

1) If your group has a "collective" dynamic, openly allocate the XP to the party and ask them to keep OOC knowledge separate from IC knowledge.

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- 2) If they have an "individualist" dynamic, secretly give all the XP to the thief player.
 - 3) If they have a "competitive-collective" dynamic, secretly allocate the XP to the party, using one of the techniques Tywyll suggested to conceal the cause of the XP.

When I say "collective" "individualist" and "competitive-collective" I'm referring to some ideas I sketched out in an article here:

<http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/columns/checkfortraps/8041-Managing-Problems-and-Players>

Effects of Wrestling

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/effects-wrestling>

August 11, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

The effects of Wrestling are pretty clearly explained, but much is left to the fiction.

Like, I'm assuming that a grappled opponent can't just move away (or retreat), because he's in a wrestling hold.

On the other hand, there's nothing saying a grappled foe can't attack, other than the fiction. So, is that how it should be played? Or is my fighter assumed to still be (awkwardly) swinging his broadsword around until one of the grapplers yanks it away with a 1+ Disarm?

Thanks.

A held opponent is, like any other character in melee, engaged. Therefore he would only be able to move if he declared defensive movement to leave the engagement.

However, a held character cannot use defensive movement until he escapes the hold. This was not made explicit in the rules, but was the intent of this sentence: "A held opponent may make a saving throw versus Paralysis each round to attempt to escape the hold."

While he cannot move until he escapes, a held character is not helpless; he can take other actions, including attacks. However, a held opponent can be the subject of a brawl, force back, disarm, or knock down action each round without an attack throw being required. The held opponent still receives a saving throw.

EXAMPLE:

Round 1. Marcus is face to face with an orc chieftain (saving throw 13+). He has no weapon! He makes a wrestling attack against the chieftain (-4 to his attack throw for doing so) and hits. The chieftain fails his saving throw and is now held.

The chieftain attempts to escape. He makes a saving throw but rolls a 7 and fails. He is still held.

Round 2: Marcus brawls the chieftain. He automatically hits, dealing 1d4 +2 (STR) + 2 (fighter damage bonus) non-lethal damage to the chieftain. His roll is a 3, so the chieftain takes 7 damage. Brawling does not permit a saving throw.

The chieftain hacks at Marcus with his axe. He makes an attack throw and misses. He is also still held.

Round 3: Marcus decides to shove the chieftain into a nearby burning brazier. This is a forceback. He automatically hits. The chieftain gets a saving throw, but fails. Marcus's normal damage is 1d4+4 and the roll is 5, so the chieftain is shoved back 5' into the brazier. He takes 1d8 damage as burning oil coats him., for a total of 6.

The chieftain is now free of the hold. He charges Marcus with his axe and misses.

Round 4: The chieftain takes another 1d8 damage from burns, rolling a 5. He has now taken 18 points of damage and expires.

Magical Bows vs Magical Arrows

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/magical-bows-vs-magical-arrows>

August 28, 2012

Tag: Q&A

James S wrote:

Hi guys,

A quick query regarding the wording of this section of the rules:

"In addition, magical weapons will provide bonuses to attack throws and damage rolls. For instance, an arrow +1 gives a bonus of +1 to damage. A bow +1 gives a bonus of +1 to attack."

Will a magical ranged weapon ONLY provide a to-hit bonus and NOT a damage bonus? Whilst Magical ammunition provides a damage bonus only.

Secondly - if a creature is only harmed by magical weapons, which of these combinations will work:

- 1. Normal Bow, Normal Arrows.*
- 2. Normal Bow, Magical Arrows.*
- 3. Magical Bow, Normal Arrows.*
- 4. Magical Bow, Magical Arrows.*

I'm assuming that 1 will not harm the creature while 2 and 4 would. I'm unsure whether 3 would or would not. I suspect, by RAW, it would not.

Hello James,

1) This is very clumsily written and I apologize. In my early drafts, magical ranged weapons only provided a bonus to attack while magical arrows only provided a bonus to damage. Unfortunately this produced some odd inconsistencies. Among them was the fact that either a magical spear became less sharp when you threw it (because it was now a "ranged weapon") and that crafting magical bows and arrows was now twice as expensive relative to the bonus provided. I fear I didn't do a good job of fixing this problem.

Leaving aside the Rules as Written, which are vague, I would recommend you allow both bows and arrows to have a +1 bonus to hit and damage. Melee weapons benefit from STR bonus and a wide variety of magic items that increase STR bonus (gauntlets of ogre power, girdles of giant strength, etc.). Given that arrows are always expendable items, it helps archers to let the bonuses stack a bit.

2) Normal missiles projected by magic bows count as magical missiles. This is mentioned under the spell "Protection from Normal Missiles" but it applies generally.

Converting Coins & Banking

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/converting-coins-banking>

August 30, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

My players have a problem. Currently they're lugging around about 30 pounds of coins, and that's just going to get worse as they find more.

Their current base of operations is a rinky-dink Class VI village, and the closest "big city" that they know about is actually just a Class IV town.

So, there's only so much they can buy...

My question is, what are their options for making that money more portable? Would money-changers exist in a Class VI market? Would they even be able to handle 10,000 GP worth of coin?

They could buy gems and jewelry, but there's only 1 10GP gem in the entire town. Even if they buy one gem of each type, that's still only a few handfuls of gems, leaving 9,800 coins in their purses.

Should they just dig a hole outside of town and bury their valuables there until they can get back to it?

Any suggestions?

This is exactly the sort of problem you want your players to have. This should motivate them to either:

- 1) Travel to a larger city where they can safely deposit their wealth with a bank or buy gems and jewelry; or
- 2) Establish a hideout where they can store their loot

Reaction Roll Timing

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/reaction-roll-timing>

September 02, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

Reaction rolls are very handy, but it's not quite clear to me how they're used in a dungeon encounter.

You make a roll for the monsters when they're encountered, but without a CHA bonus, because nobody has had a chance to act yet.

An indifferent result is open to parley, but if the smooth-talking elf parleys, the reaction would be at +4 (for example).

Do you roll a new reaction roll once somebody talks, or just apply any bonuses to the original roll?

Something else?

The official rule is:

Make a reaction roll after surprise is resolved. Add the following modifiers immediately:

1. CHA of the highest CHA character
2. Mystic Aura
3. Circumstantial modifiers at Judge's discretion*

Add the following modifiers only if conversation ensues:

1. Diplomacy
2. Intimidation
3. Seduction

*EXAMPLE: If an adventurer enters an NPC's house with a bloody sword in one hand and the NPC's wife's severed head in the other, impose a significant penalty on the reaction roll.

One of the things that's on my "wish list" of design mechanics is a more robust resolution method for diplomacy, intimidation, and reactions. I have a draft I've been using for ACKS Cyberpunk, but other priorities have been at the forefront of my work lately (PC, DaW, Auran Empire).

Jard then wrote:

Interesting, so in the case of my players where one person has mystic aura, one has a high CHA, and a 3rd has seduction, they could potentially get a very high reaction roll after starting a conversation?

I wouldn't let different bonuses stack from different individuals. I'd instead apply the bonus of the character who takes the lead in the interaction.

EXAMPLE:

Party's reaction roll is 7.

Clarissa has CHA 13 and Seduction.

Hans has CHA 11 and Mystic Aura.

Jager has CHA 16 and Diplomacy.

The initial reaction is 7, +2 from Mystic Aura, so 9; or 7+2 from Jager's CHA, so 9.

If Jager then engages in Diplomacy, the reaction roll would go up to 11.

If Clarissa takes the lead and engages in Seduction, the reaction roll would be 7 +1 (CHA) +2 (Seduction), so 10.

If Hans takes the lead, the reaction roll would 7 +2 (Mystic Aura) 9.

Scoot & Shoot

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/scoot-shoot>

September 13, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Jard wrote:

I suppose this happened plenty in B/X upon which ACKs is based as well, but it seems like when you have a fight on wide open plains, unencumbered archers have an amazing advantage against anyone with less than full move speed and no ranged attack. They can shoot from long range, having a low but not non-existent chance to hit, and then switch to a full run when targets get too close. In fact it would seem that they'll eventually end up with a foe who has spent too many rounds running and is now a sitting duck.

I have a few solutions: I assume any kind of intelligent humanoid has some kind of ranged attack, for anything but plains hexes I can reasonably limit the size of the battlefield or even create tight "corridors" from natural structures that limit running potential, but for example some of my players were able to take down a skittering maw at level 1 without taking a single hit using this exact strategy.

Am I missing something or is this how RAW works? I'm not sure I NEED to do anything since it's a fairly rare confluence of events, but it just seems a bit odd.

Archers on a wide open plain are definitely at their best. That said, even in the best possible case, they won't inevitably win. The balancing factors are:

1. They have to monitor ammunition
2. They suffer severe range penalties (-5 at long range). Typically this will result in an attack throw of 20+ for low-level archers against armored characters.
3. A melee attacker in ACKS can attack with a charge (~ 90' charge movement rate for armored characters) whereas an archer can only fire with combat movement (~ 40' combat movement rate for unarmored archers). So the melee attacker is tactically faster in terms of controlling the range, unless the archer gives up the opportunity to attack. This means that the melee attacker can keep the archer at long range, if desired.

With a typical archer carrying 20 arrows and hitting only on a 20, he's only likely to hit once before running out of ammo. One hit might be enough to kill the melee attacker, but it might not.

In general, though, it's not a bad thing if unencumbered archers dominate on wide open plains. Consider the Asian Steppes, which were dominated by the Scythians (archers), Huns (archers), Parthians (archers), and Mongols (archers). Conversely, the heavy spearmen of Greece dominated in a landscape of narrow, constricted battlefields.

Wilderness Sandboxes and Experience

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/wilderness-sandboxes-and-experience>

September 27, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

I'm curious how people handle the wilderness sandbox and the experience issue. Namely, if you don't get experience until you get back to civilization, and if civilization is 100's of miles away (and several sessions), what do you do?

While I can see a normal (4-6 hour) session with a stable group handling that fairly well (they are away for weeks of travel and adventure, and when they /finally/ return home, everyone dings). My play sessions are very short (we are lucky to get 3 hours of play) and other than two stable guys, I have a bunch of other players that have maybe a 50% hit rate....making a fair distribution from treasure alone difficult.

Any ideas on a way to tackle this? The simplest would be to give xp upon finding the treasure, so basically giving xp for everyone present on any given session. Any other ideas?

If you don't want to assign treasure immediately upon receipt, here's two ideas:

1. Dot your wilderness with "shelters" such as abandoned cabins, old Imperial watch towers, and run-down caravanserais. Reaching one of those qualifies as reaching civilization; or
2. As soon as the PCs enjoy a night's rest outside of the dungeon without interruption by a wandering encounter they get their XP.

What is the ACKS Version of the Ability Check?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/what-acks-version-ability-check>

October 09, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

mbeacom wrote:

Ok, so I've been going back over the rules again and trying to do some mental conversions of other gaming materials. I feel like I'm missing something. What is the ACKS way of doing ability checks? I mean, if a character tries something strange or creative with a risk of failure that doesn't fall under a proficiency or class skill, how does one adjudicate success? Use the adventuring proficiency? What would be the default proficiency throw by level? Am I missing something? Thanks in advance!

I personally don't use ability checks. I'll tend to use a throw mechanic of some sort.

For team tasks, I'd use a proficiency throw of 11+. That will ensure that in a party of 4, someone almost always succeeds.

For out-of-the-ordinary tasks, I'd use a proficiency throw of 14+, modified by the character's ability score adjustment.

For risky challenges with grim consequences, I'd use a proficiency throw of 4+, modified by the character's ability score adjustment.

For tasks that are easy for someone with great ability but hard for someone with less ability, I'd use a proficiency throw of 18+, modified by 4x the ability score adjustment.

Most of these mechanics are already implicit in the rules in various places. For example, Open Doors uses the 18+ throw with quadruple ability adjustments.

XP Averages

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/xp-averages>

October 22, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Rodriguez wrote:

I wonder what is the rough average of XP do ACKS adventurers in your groups usually gain at the end of an evening.

I know its very dependent on a lot of factors it still would be interesting.

In my campaign I have an average of 490 (before bonuses) but the median is probably closer to 250-300 as once a group of 2 got really really lucky.

That just feels horribly slow and I already give out bonus experience for traveling and exploration (a current average of 300 per session for the whole group, usually 2-3 adventurers + henchmen)

That does sound slow.

There are basically two "knobs" that will determine how much XP the adventurers earn. The first knob is how much treasure you give the monsters. The second knob is how much risk your players are willing to take.

For the treasure knob, in general, you should have 4gp of treasure per 1 XP of monsters in your dungeon/setting.

Rodriguez then wrote:

Most of them are pretty unexperienced and rather cautious so they seldom come to the good parts of the dungeon (if they even reach the dungeon at all...)

Is the 1:4 ratio already figured into the treasure tables or is that extra?

What should I do with random encounters? They usually have no treasures with them right?

The 1:4 ratio is already figured into the treasure tables, yes.

Random encounters don't have treasure usually.

Bracing Against Charges

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/bracing-against-charges>

November 02, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Jard wrote:

My players and I have been reviewing the rules for bracing against charging fairly closely, as their entirely level 1 cohort of PCs, Henchmen, and mercenaries are facing down a 6 strong pack of goblin dire wolf riders, and they're looking for every advantage they can get.

The goblins started off several hundred feet away, requiring multiple rounds of running to close into charging distance. This has brought up a few questions

1) can you brace against a charge and hold it for multiple rounds? (thereby negating the requirement to beat the target on initiative if they're far enough away)

2) can you brace against a charge from the 2nd rank?

3) if someone charges into a line of braced spears, does everyone within reach get to attack for double, or only the one who was charged?

Based on the rules and the scene from braveheart, my inkling for number 1 is that you have to beat them on initiative on the round of impact to do double damage, but reach weapons and ranged weapons get to deal at least 1x damage on the initiative that the rider charges (based on the paragraph at the top of pg 101), but I could be wrong and they can brace no matter what. I have no inkling on number 2 though. it seems like if you can attack from the 2nd rank you COULD brace, but maybe you have to be actually getting charged. This brings up number 3. Any insight into the general purpose/balancing of bracing that might help adjudicate future situations is appreciated as well :-)

Here are the relevant rules:

1. "Each round, 1d6 is rolled for **initiative** for each adventurer, monster, and group of identical monsters." [Initiative]

2. "A combatant using a weapon with a long reach (spears, for instance) may choose to attack a closing opponent on the closing opponent's number and thus attack simultaneously with the opponent, even if the combatant rolled lower for initiative." [Initiative]

3. "Once two opposing combatants are within 5' of each other, they are **engaged**" [Movement]

4. An "attack made after a running move... is called a Charge." [Charging]

5. "Spears, pole arms, and certain other piercing weapons deal double damage when "set" (braced against the ground or floor) and used against a charging combatant. To set against charge, the combatant being charged must have equal or better initiative; this counts as holding an action. Both charging and charged combatant act on the charging combatant's initiative number and are therefore simultaneous." [Set for Charge]

6. "Whenever a combatant kills or incapacitates an opponent with a melee or missile attack, he may immediately make another attack throw against another opponent within 5' of the target he has just dropped." [Cleaving]

7. "Characters armed with spears can attack from the second rank in melee and inflict double damage when used in or against a charge." [Spears]

Therefore to answer your question:

1) can you brace against a charge and hold it for multiple rounds? (thereby negating the requirement to beat the target on initiative if they're far enough away)

No. You can be assured that you will at least attack simultaneously with the opponent due to the Initiative rule, but you have equal or better Initiative to the enemy to deal double damage.

2) can you brace against a charge from the 2nd rank?

The intent is that "setting for charge" is a way of attacking with spears, and spears allow you to attack from the second rank. Therefore, **yes**.

3) if someone charges into a line of braced spears, does everyone within reach get to attack for double, or only the one who was charged?

Yes, everyone within reach can attack. **Yes**, anyone set for charge deals double damage.

That said, the rules are admittedly susceptible to multiple interpretations in number 3, because of the language "the combatant being charged" and "the charging combatant" suggests that only the target being charged can deal double damage. In this light, remember that if you're within 5' of an opponent, you are considered "engaged" by the opponent, even if he's attacking someone else; moreover, should the opponent kill his target, you are at risk of being attacked by the opponent on that initiative number (because of cleaving). Therefore in a practical sense you are a "charged combatant" if you are a combatant engaged by a charge. So while this is a slightly tortured reading of the rules, I'd say it's the *correct* one.

EXAMPLE: A party of 7 spearmen, with 4 in the front rank and 3 in the second rank, are charged by a pack of 4 goblin riders on dire wolves. The front rank spearmen are each adventurers (named A, B, C, and D), while the second rank are a group of hired light infantry. The goblin riders begin 300' away (two rounds of movement).

Round 1. Initiative rolls are: A 6, B 5, C 3, D 2, Light Infantry 4, Goblin Riders 4.

On 6, A sets for charge.

On 5, B sets for charge.

On 4, Light Infantry set for charge. Goblin Rider's advance 150'.

On 3, C sets for charge.

On 2, D sets for charge.

Round 2. Initiative rolls are A 1, B 2, C 4, D 5, Light Infantry 4, Goblin Riders 3.

On 5, D sets for charge.

On 4, C sets for charge. Light Infantry set for charge.

On 3, Goblin Riders charge. Goblin Rider 1 charges A, Goblin Rider 2 charges B, Goblin Rider 3 charges C, Goblin Rider 4 charges D. The fight plays out as follows:

A attacks Goblin Rider 1 simultaneously with 1's attack on A

B attacks Goblin Rider 2 simultaneously with 2's attack on B

C attacks Goblin Rider 3 simultaneously with 3's attack on C, and deals double damage if he hits

D attacks Goblin Rider 4 simultaneously with 4's attack on D, and deals double damage if he hits

The Light Infantry could attack any of the Goblin Riders simultaneous with their attacks on A-D, and deal double damage if they hit.

Using Staffs & Wands

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/using-staffs-wands>

November 12, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Hjorimir wrote:

Is casting a spell from a staff or wand a normal action or a spell casting action? What I mean by that, is (in combat) if you plan on casting a spell from a staff do you...

Have to declare this before initiative is rolled

Risk losing the spell (i.e. charge) if you are hit before you cast it

Are unable to move in the round you activate the item

Or, is casting from a staff or wand just a "normal" attack action?

Beastman then wrote:

I have searched the ACKS-CR's text to no avail and then, finally, hidden at the end of the book:

ACKS CR p.257: (3) Act on Initiative: according to this table, you can move before using a wand and using a wand is not like casting a spell in that your action can be disrupted. The same can also be assumed of rods and staffs, although it is not explicitly stated.

Thomas Weigel then wrote:

p. 103, Casting Spells.

p. 104, Other Actions.

Wands is listed under Other Actions. There is no implication that I can find that using a wand is the same as a spellcaster casting a spell.

It is also worth noting that the text for scrolls (in the magic items chapter, p. 216) describes the result as casting a spell from a scroll; the wands, staffs, and rods entry (p. 217) describes the result as "triggering an effect."

Thomas and Beastman are correct. Using a wand, staff, or rod is *not* the same as casting a spell. You are permitted to use a wand, staff, or rod without declaring such before the initiative roll, and you can move and then use the item.

Thus, a mage with a wand of fireballs can step around the corner and fireball his opponent, whereas a mage casting a fireball spell would have to begin the round with line of sight on his opponent, since he can't move and cast.

ACKS and Miniatures

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/acks-and-miniatures>

November 22, 2012

Tag: Q&A

golan2072 wrote:

How useful are miniatures in the normal ACKS combat system? How many of you use minis to play? I'm considering getting a few fantasy minis and a battlemat but I'm not sure they're necessary for a good ACKS experience.

Also, what scale of minis does Domains at War use? 15mm? 28mm?

You can play ACKS with miniatures if you'd like. The 5' engagement rules lend themselves nicely to a map gridded in 5' squares. You can also just use miniatures to approximate the battle situation, which is largely how I do it.

Domains at War can be used with any scale of miniatures. It's hex-based, so you simply need to use a hex map that's large enough to hold whatever you decide to use to represent 1 unit of troops. To date, we have played DAW with one of two scales:

1. 1" hexes on standard fantasy battlemaps, using 1 standard fantasy miniature to represent 1 unit;
2. 2" hexes on "Battlelore" / "Battles of Westeros" mapsheets, using 1 stand of 15mm soldiers (40mm wide x 20mm) to represent 1 unit

For folks who are really into the wargame side of things, I suggest option #2 as the "recommended" scale for DAW. Battlelore maps are pretty widely available (either from the boardgames or from expansion packs that sell for about \$10) and the 40mm x 20mm basing is used in DBA, DBM, WRG, Armati, and more.

Why Do You Have to Declare You Are Withdrawing?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/why-do-you-have-declare-you-are-withdrawing>

December 03, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Beragon wrote:

Hi Alex and Co:

I understand why you need to declare spell casting and retreating before rolling your initiative from a mechanical sense, but I'm unsure why you need to do so for withdrawing. Would you mind explaining it for me :).

It's intended to force an interesting choice on the player. As he watches his hit points dwindle, does he make the proactive decision to flee? I suppose it's more of a psychological mechanism than a mechanic. Players can become quite angst-ridden over the decision to declare a withdrawal.

Firing Missile Weapons PAST Characters Engaged in Melee

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/firing-missile-weapons-past-characters-engaged-melee>

January 16, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Bascaria wrote:

So you can't fire missile weapons at characters engaged in melee without the precise shooting proficiency. Got it. Easy enough.

But can you fire missile weapons past characters engaged in melee, particularly in a constricted space, such as a dungeon hallway, without much clearance above or around the scrum?

As an example, two groups of enemies, each formed up with armored infantry in front rank, spearmen in second, archers/mages 10 feet behind the 2nd rank.

The two groups clash in a 10' hallway, each group is 3 abreast. Can the archers (who do not have precise shooting) fire at the 2nd or 3rd rank of the other group? If so, what would the penalties be, and is there a chance of accidentally striking any of the intervening folk?

Ludanto then wrote:

Not official, but to assuage my own sensibilities regarding the same topic, I've assumed that enemy characters provide cover for their allies if they're between their ally and the shooter and within a few feet of one another. Specifically, I've applied a -2 penalty, though it might work well enough at -1.

As for low ceilings and such, I think that's accounted for in the weapon's indoor range (feet instead of yards).

Interestingly enough, I also ruled that firing "past" melee was permitted at a -2 penalty.

It creates a very fun, tactically rich dynamic wherein frontline fighters engage in melee, secondline spearmen spike through into the engagement, and thirdline and fourthline bowmen shoot into the enemy's rear, grinding down reinforcements (and/or taking out the mages).

The only area where the rule can get painful/broken is when you have "snipers" shooting through huge melees into wizards hiding in the rear. Generally I'd impose a -2 if you're trying to attack the nearest rear-rank combatant, and an additional -2 for each extra rank. So a wizard in the 4th or 5th rank would be at -6 or -8 to be hit.

Non-Movement Movement?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/non-movement-movement>

March 16, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

Initially, I thought that the Knockdown maneuver was pretty weak, since all you had to do was get back up on your turn, and it's not like you were going anywhere anyway.

Then I made the connection between "getting up" and "moving", specifically, that you can't get up if you can't move, and you can't move if you're engaged, so you can't get up if you're engaged.

Am I understanding that correctly? Do you have to Overrun to get up while engaged? What about readying a shield or picking up an item from the ground or any of the other things listed under "Other Movement" (p 101)?

If you are engaged you cannot move or take actions in lieu of moving, unless you engage in defensive movement or you overrun.

Note that most non-movement actions you might wish to do can still be done in lieu of your attack.

Malo Monkey then wrote:

But, the rules for Knock Down on page 109 state, "A prone combatant may get up on his round instead of moving, or crawl at a speed of 5' per round." I think I'd interpret the specificity of this rule as superseding the more general defensive movement rule.

After all, when is one going to be knocked down and not be engaged? Wouldn't it typically be a maneuver that's used while one is within melee range of their target? I suppose you could make the argument for certain ranged spells or pole-arms with reach being capable of delivering a knock down. But, I do not imagine that's supposed to be representative of the common use case of the special maneuver.

The rules are not exceptionally well-written in this case, and I apologize for the confusion. Being knocked down in a melee should be one of the worst things that can happen to a combatant. Historically, it was a death sentence, or close to it. Achieving a knockdown in ACKS is quite hard to do: You have to hit the target at -4. Then the target gets to make a saving throw.

On the alternative interpretation of the rules, all a knockdown achieves is that attackers lucky enough to strike the knocked-down target between the time when he is knocked down and the time when he stands up receive a bonus to hit. True, the character cannot move the next round, but since he was engaged he couldn't have moved anyway, unless he was running away.

The rule states that "a prone combatant may get up on his round instead of moving, or crawl at a speed of 5' per round. If he attacks while prone, he suffers a -4 penalty on his attack throw." These should be understood as presenting three alternatives: stand up; crawl; or attack while prone.

The more generous interpretation (that a character can get up and then attack) would make the ability to attack while prone at -4 completely irrelevant: Why would you ever do it, when you can stand up immediately and still attack?

Uninterrupted Rest and Daily Spells

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/uninterrupted-rest-and-daily-spells>

April 18, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

So, how "uninterrupted" is "uninterrupted" when it comes to nightly rest?

If somebody wakes you, is that interrupted? What if there's an encounter, but no combat? What if there's a combat, but you're not in it?

I can see an argument for attacking or being attacked as being an interruption.

Does casting a spell interrupt rest?

If you roll a random encounter during the evening, are the spell-casters hosed?

As a rule of thumb, I generally say that your rest is interrupted if you attack, are attacked, cast a spell, flee/run, or engage in more than 6 turns (1 hour) of sedentary activity.

Nerdnumber1 then wrote:

So if you ignore a swirling melee occurring around your camp, you're fine, even if it is very loud?
Cool.

Nerdnumber1: That's why I said "rule of thumb" and not "official rule".

Fleeing and Withdrawing “Backwards”?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/fleeing-and-withdrawing-backwards>

May 01, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Ludanto wrote:

Fleeing and Withdrawing say that you can move “backward”, but what does that mean? Is it simply “away from engaged foes”, or “away from an engaged foe” or something else?

Also, is it just straight movement, or can you, once you’ve gotten a couple of steps away, turn corners and such?

Thanks!

If you flee or withdraw you have to move away from the engaged enemy. Anything more specific than that has been left to the Judge. Whether they can, e.g., run out of a door, leap behind a wall, etc. is up to you.

Can Dwarves Float in Your Games?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/can-dwarves-float-your-games>

May 07, 2013

Tag: Q&A

harmyn wrote:

Its an oddball question I know, but can dwarves float in your games? They weigh almost as much as a man does but are shorter and more compact. There was a series of books I read long ago, Guardians of the Flame, and in it they pointed out that the density of dwarves was such that they couldn't float and so avoided water when possible.

I know in the real world runners often have the problem that their bodies become unable to float because of the concentration of muscle mass in half their body; they basically become human bobbies and sink if they aren't actively swimming.

So, I am saying that a dwarf could still swim, but would they also be able to naturally float or do they need to keep attempting to swim at all times in your games?

I think if one wanted to be a real jerk, you could divide the character's STR by his height in feet and if the number exceeds 3, he has too much muscle and too little fat to float!

EXAMPLE:

Alex (me): STR 7, Height 6.1 = 1.14, floats well

Conan: STR 18, Height 6.1 = 2.95, barely floats

Bob the Dwarf: STR 18, Height 4' = 4.5, SINKS!

Heh, heh.

Retreat Duration

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/retreat-duration>

May 10, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

I get the 1d10 rounds bit, but what about "no longer pursued by any enemies"? Does that mean that if nobody is firing at them or attacking them or moving toward them?

What if they weren't engaged in the first place? My party lost half of its members in an ambush by carcass-scavengers (nasty), and understandably many of the hirelings at the other end of the marching order were a bit shaken up by the sudden experience. If nobody is immediately trying to get them, do they run, or just lose a round to knee-rattling?

Ok, maybe I don't understand this that well after all.

The monsters will continue to retreat/withdraw until they are no longer pursued by any enemies, or until a minimum of 1d10 rounds have elapsed.

I read this as:

Not Pursued = Recover

Pursued = Minimum of 10 Rounds

But maybe it's:

Pursued = Keep Running

Not Pursued = 1d10 Rounds

Hm.

"The monsters will continue to retreat/withdraw until they are no longer pursued by any enemies, or until a minimum of 1d10 rounds have elapsed."

The operative word is "minimum". The rule means:

1. The monsters will continue to retreat until they are no longer pursued by enemies.
2. Even if pursuit is non-existent or broken off sooner, the minimum amount of time the monsters will retreat is 1d10 rounds.

Declaring Spell Targets for AoE Spells

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/declaring-spell-targets-aoe-spells>

May 14, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

Ok so I know when you declare a spell at the beginning of a round you must declare both spell and target. How does that work with AOE spells? Do you pick where in space the spell will explode and if the targets happen to move beyond that area does the spell miss? Or can you pick a target and 'track' them so long as they stay in sight and range?

In the recent session the party was fighting flyers and I ruled they had to pick the area when they started casting meaning the flyers probably wouldn't be there if they beat the initiative roll. Reading the casting rules I'm not so sure I was right.

Ludanto then wrote:

From [THIS](http://www.autarch.co/comment/5434#comment-5434) post. <http://www.autarch.co/comment/5434#comment-5434>

Also, from p. 66 of the core rules:

...a PC must announce the intention to cast a spell prior to initiative being determined at the beginning of a round...a spellcaster must have the intended target of a spell within visual range (unless otherwise noted), whether the target is a specific monster, character, or area of effect

Interestingly, it says that PCs must declare, not just any character.

Also, as far as I can tell, this mostly only matters to Fireball, which targets a point in space. Other spells, like Flame Strike, just say "target". Lightning Bolt doesn't even say what it targets, just that it affects all creatures in its area.

(Another interesting fact, despite being 30' high and 10' wide, Flame Strike reads as only affecting one target.)

I wonder, can I choose? If I don't want to target an area to Lightning Bolt (or Fireball) a guy, can I target him directly, ensuring he's hit if he's there, while risking collateral damage?

Hello guys -

1) NPCs are also declaring, but they're declaring to the Judge.

2) "target" is not synonymous with "target creature". I was not entirely consistent in this usage, which I regret. In general, unless the spells says (or context clearly suggests) otherwise, a "target" can be a creature, an object, or a point in space.

3) The rule in question you are referencing to states "Finally, in most instances a spellcaster must have the intended target of a spell within visual range (unless otherwise noted), whether the target is a specific monster, character, or area of effect." This is part of a larger paragraph, which lists the requirements for successfully casting a spell.

"All spellcasters need to be able to move their hands and speak in order to make the gestures and say the magical phrases that bring magic effects into being. As a result, a spellcaster cannot cast spells if he is gagged, his hands are tied, or he is in an area under the effects of a silence spell. Spellcasters may take no other actions during the same round they intend to cast a spell. As described in the Initiative section of Chapter 6, a PC must announce the intention to cast a spell prior to initiative being determined at the beginning of a round. Should an opponent successfully deal damage to the character or if the character is required to roll a saving throw and fails prior to casting a spell, the spell is disrupted and fails. The spell still counts against the character's spells per day as if it had been cast. Finally, in most instances a spellcaster must have the intended target of a spell within visual range (unless otherwise noted), whether the target is a specific monster, character, or area of effect."

The sentence above is not meant to be controlling on the requirement of pre-declaration, it's meant to be controlling on the requirement to cast a spell.

To put it another way, the paragraph should be read as follows:

"In order to cast a spell, the spellcaster must:

1. Have announced the intention to cast that spell prior to initiative being determined.
2. Be able to move his hands and speak magical phrases.
3. Take no other action during that round.
4. Not take damage or fail a saving throw during that round.
5. Have the intended target of the spell within visual range.

It is NOT intended to be read as follows:

1. Have announced the intention to cast that spell prior to initiative being determined.
 - 1a. And have the intended target of the spell within visual range prior to initiative being determined.
2. Be able to move his hands and speak magical phrases.
3. Take no other action during that round.
4. Not take damage or fail a saving throw during that round.

Why Doesn't Strength Apply to Thrown Weapon Damage in ACKS?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/why-doesnt-strength-apply-thrown-weapon-damage-acks>

May 20, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Slippery_Chicken wrote:

It strikes me as unrealistic that when the weakest possible human (Str 3) hurls a rock or hand-axe at you, it hits just as hard as when the strongest person ever (Str 18) does it.

Raw physical power certainly applies to how hard one can hurl an object (that is, how much force you can add to it to increase impact). After all, a baseball thrown by Tiny Tim would surely deal less damage than one thrown by Superman. The former might hurt or even injure you, but the latter would more likely tear through your body and leave you as a bloody mess.

Another example: If I propel a fist-sized lead ball at a person, it would inflict much less damage than when a cannon does the same. The difference isn't in accuracy or dexterity (if anything, the cannon is less likely to hit a moving target), but in the force ("Raw physical power") applied to the shot.

So considering the reality, why was this choice made in ACKS? Is this an oversight? A concession to tradition? Does someone seriously believe that Tiny Tim will inflict the same damage as Superman with a thrown object?

You can certainly apply the STR bonus to thrown weapons, if you'd like. I didn't do so because of niche protection. Right now, ranged attacks benefit from high DEX, but not high STR. It's nice to be able to say "I rolled a high DEX, so I'll be a ranged character" and not have to say "but I won't be as good as Bob's STR 18 fighter even at range". Jared, for crossbows, a rule I wrote for D@W is that troops cannot move and fire when using crossbows. This represents the fact you have to be stationary to reload a crossbow. You could implement that in man-to-man ACKS if you'd like.

Are Declared Actions Visible?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/are-declared-actions-visible>

May 31, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

That is, if the Mage declares that he's casting a spell, does he start chanting and waving his arms on count zero, such that the enemy can see that he's casting?

On a related note, is it likewise assumed that foes that declare a retreat or withdrawal are visibly getting ready to move?

The rules are not explicit on this point. From a Talmudic reading of the manual, I have ruled:

1. A declaration of spellcasting is apparent. How do we know? Because the spellcasting can be interrupted. Since the spellcasting can be interrupted, we can conclude that whatever is involved in spellcasting is happening; and since spellcasting requires vigorous speaking and gestures, the declaration must be visible. Note that although the declaration of spellcasting is apparent, the exact spell or target is not. A character with Collegiate Wizardry might be able to identify the spell being cast from the motions, words, and spell signature.
2. A declaration of full retreat is apparent. How do we know? Because the character suffers a penalty to AC that round. The AC penalty kicks in when the retreat is declared, and not when the retreat occurs. Therefore, some retreat-like activity must have begun at the moment of declaration.
3. A declaration of fighting withdrawal is not apparent. How do we know? Well, we don't, but what we do know is that the fighting withdrawal can't be interrupted and doesn't impose any penalty to the retreat. We also know that if an enemy **follows** a character who withdraws, the character who withdraws gets to attack, but no such ruling enables a withdrawing character to strike at an enemy who hits him before he withdraws. This suggests that the withdrawal doesn't actually occur when declared, but instead takes place on the character's initiative.

I think all of the above are also the correct interpretations in terms of fun gameplay. Having spellcasting be apparent means that spellcasters have a period of vulnerability where they can be interrupted. Having full retreat be apparent allows you to press the attack or allow them to escape, depending on alignment, goals, etc. Having withdrawal not be apparent means that a character can sometimes manage to fall back safely, with a pursuer unwilling to risk the free attack if he follows.

Casting While Mounted

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/casting-while-mounted>

June 04, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Nerdnumber1 wrote:

I was re-reading the mounted combat rules and could not find a rule that explicitly states that a character needs the riding proficiency to cast while mounted in combat, only to attack. It only requires that the caster's mount remain stationary. Obviously if the mount bolts or the caster is knocked from the mount the spell fails (not to mention the fact that even casters like to use melee once in a while), but the finicky nature of spell-casting made me expect stricter rules, so I wanted a clarification:

Can a character cast in combat while mounted without the riding proficiency?

If no, then can a caster cast while mounted if not in combat?

If yes, then how far away from unfriendly armed people constitutes "not in combat"?

What about casting from a mount when sharing a horse? For example: Say Reginald the mage hired on a henchmen who was a far better rider than he and bought a sturdy warhorse. Could Reginald cast when riding while his henchman steered (in this example the henchman has riding but the mage does not)? I know there are likely few if any military saddles meant to hold two riders on a horse, and taking such a group into melee is likely a bad idea, but a mage might like the idea of being able to run away faster.

On a related note: How strict is this "stationary" requirement? Specifically, if mounted on a flying mount attempting to hover, could a character cast? I would think that, even if a pegasus could hover in place, it would involve an irritating amount of up and down movement that, if anything, is more jarring than a smooth glide. This might be more complexity than is really necessary, but I could see a mount going into a gentle glide to try to make casting as easy as possible (of course, I'm assuming that the stationary requirement is to prevent jostling of the mage, not because the caster needs to stay still for other reasons such as a need to form magic in the air around themselves in a way that doesn't work while moving quickly, etc.)

By virtue of the Adventuring proficiency, all characters are considered to be capable "trail riders", e.g., they know how to stay on a horse for a day's riding. (As someone who owns two horses and is *not* a capable trail rider, allow me to assure you that simply staying on a horse for a few hours is an incredible feat that involves major swelling and bruises!)

Riding proficiency represents the skill level of a steeplechaser, fox hunter, event jumper, etc. Put another way, if you think of Riding as the ancient equivalent of driving a car, Riding proficiency is the equivalent of someone who drives for a living - a taxi driver negotiating crazy NY streets for example, or a NASCAR driver. You need Riding proficiency to ride in combat.

To answer your specific questions:

A character can cast while mounted provided the mount is stationary and not engaged (= within 5' of an enemy).

Whether a specific instance of movement of some third-party transport counts as jostling is going to depend on the Judge's discretion. Examples:

- 1) The mage is stationary, standing on Earth, moving around the sun: Stationary! (heh)
- 2) The mage is stationary, standing on a war galley, moving across the water: Stationary
- 3) The mage is stationary, sitting in a kayak hurtling through white water: Not Stationary
- 4) The mage is stationary, sitting on the back of a moving horse: Not Stationary
- 5) The mage is stationary, sitting on a flying carpet hovering in the sky: Stationary
- 6) The mage is stationary, sitting on a flying carpet racing through the sky at full speed: Not Stationary
- 7) The mage is stationary, sitting on a flying carpet slowly drifting through the sky: ... Could go either way. How fast is the wind? Is the carpet being shot at? etc.

How Long to Put Armour On?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/how-long-put-armour>

June 08, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Kiero wrote:

My game is historical, and the PCs don't spend their days underground, fully-armoured, all the time they are awake. Most of the time, they are unarmoured, or at most wearing light armour. Wearing full armour is hot, uncomfortable and tiring. The hot part is especially relevant since the game takes place in and around the Mediterranean.

So how long should it take to get armour on? Most have scale, which is probably just pulling the thorax over their heads and arranging the straps to make it comfortable. But one PC has a full hoplite panoply, with corselet and back-and-breastplate, greaves, and a heavy helm. In all instances they have people to assist them in getting armoured (though often that person will themselves then need assistance getting into their armour).

I'm guessing the most pressing one is when surprised, because you'll have absolutely no time before the enemy can act.

Any thoughts? Is this already in the book and I missed it?

I generally use 1 round per point of AC in my own games.

It's worth noting, however, that in the ancient world the Romans, at least, generally **did** march with their armor on, while carrying their own food, water, and supplies, and hiking upwards of 20 miles per day. They were bad ass.

Humans today are weak - our bones are less sturdy than those of our ancestors. Due to punishing hardship from childhood, our ancestors were physically tougher than we even **can** be, regardless of genes or training, because our childhoods are spent in comparative ease.

What we see as an inconceivable feat of endurance, they did every day. Modern Olympic rowers cannot sustain the average speed of Trireme rowers. Modern athletes cannot even make it 10 minutes wearing hoplite armor that the ancients are said to have worn for hours. The bones of longbowmen are simply bulkier than our bones can be. Hell, the US Army today can hardly even find soldiers whose feet are tough enough for combat boots! The book *Manthropology* has great details on this.

To make a long story short, I tend to allow my PCs to wear armor, carry burdens, and perform feats that would reduce me and anyone I know to a whimpering crybaby, on the basic assumption that we are Zoo Humans and they are not.

Mortal Wounds and Lay on Hands

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/mortal-wounds-and-lay-hands>

July 05, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

MichaelPfaff wrote:

How do you guys handle the +1 per level of magical healing for Lay on Hands? Character level seems excessive, but +1 seems whack for say, a 10th Level Paladin healing like 22 hp or whatever.

Because I am a huge softie (as evidenced by the Opelenean Nights thread), I permit +1 per level of the character using Lay on Hands. This makes Lay on Hands the go-to option for mortally wounded PCs.

If you prefer a more hardcore choice, I think an accurate translation is roughly 2/3 character level.

Questions on Surprise

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/questions-surprise>

August 04, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

DrSkull wrote:

Scenario 1: Ed the Explorer (+1 surprise from Animal Reflexes) is leading a bunch of surly Gnomes through the woods. A gang of orcs leap out. Does Ed's surprise bonus only help Ed, or can he shout enough of a warning to give the gnomes a surprise bonus too?

Scenario 2: Bill the Barbarian (-1 to enemy surprise due to Naturally Stealthy) sneaks up on a patrol of hobgoblins. If he's alone, I'd be sure the hobgoblins would get a -1 to surprise. What happens if Bill is accompanied by a bunch of surly Gnomes? Is Bill's surprise advantage neutralized by their constant grumbling?

Great questions. In both cases, some judgment by the Judge is required.

Scenario 1: Is Ed "on point" ahead of the Gnomes? If so, then I'd allow Ed's surprise bonus to apply to the whole party. On the other hand, if Ed is safely ensconced in the midst of the Gnomes, then he'd have no advance warning.

Scenario 2: Is Bill scouting ahead of the Gnomes? If so, I'd allow Bill's advantage to stand. If Bill is in the midst of the Gnomes, I wouldn't.

In both cases, the question to ask yourself is, "if the enemy got the drop on Ed / Bill, would Ed / Bill be at heightened risk due to his position relative to the rest of the party?" If so, then his own Surprise benefit should apply.

XP for Selling Big Ticket Items (like Ships)

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/xp-selling-big-ticket-items-ships>

September 17, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Jard wrote:

So with some lucky-high sleep HD rolls and some inexplicably brave pirates, my PCs are on the verge of falling into possession of a small galley at about level 3. Of course their first question is "so if we sell this thing, we get XP?". Imagining myself a clever DM I dodge the question and say "aha, well even if it worked that way, you'd have to use it to get back to port!".

To this they reply "hmmm, but what if we convince the captain on the ship we bought passage from to tow it with his ship? Would that work?" (the NPC captain has the same kind of ship, a small galley with a full hold of cargo).

Ok, so first question: is the whole prospect daft? Should a ship really be worth XP if you manage to sell it?

Second question if first question is "Yes, get your XP!", how hard would it be for one small galley to tow another one? How reasonably can I lean on the NPC captain being focused on getting to the next port and not wanting to be slowed down, or would a merchant captain who managed to repel a pirate attack and take their ship be seeing dollar signs (or gold pieces) and already be trying to hash out his share?

Ok, so first question: is the whole prospect daft? Should a ship really be worth XP if you manage to sell it?

ALEX: I would absolutely give them XP if they capture a ship and sell it as a prize. Historically, the capture and sale of enemy vessels (prizes) was one of the most lucrative sources of income for naval captains - the "master & commander" series is filled with such references. It certainly seems reasonable to me to assign PCs XP for performing deeds of historical plunder!

Second question if first question is "Yes, get your XP!", how hard would it be for one small galley to tow another one?

Towing galleys was common in ancient war.

"Ramming itself was done by smashing into the rear or side of an enemy ship, punching a hole in the planking. This did not actually sink an ancient galley unless it was heavily laden with cargo and stores. With a normal load, it was buoyant enough to float even with a breached hull. It could also maneuver for some time as long as the oarsmen were not incapacitated, but would gradually lose mobility and become unstable as it flooded. The winning side would then attempt to tow away the swamped hulks as prizes." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galley>

"Grappling hooks would be used both as a weapon and for towing damaged ships (ally or enemy) back to shore." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trireme>

How reasonably can I lean on the NPC captain being focused on getting to the next port and not wanting to be slowed down, or would a merchant captain who managed to repel a pirate attack and take their ship be seeing dollar signs (or gold pieces) and already be trying to hash out his share?

He'd be seeing gold pieces and want his share. You might find this article on the historical allocation of prize money to be helpful: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prize_money

At a minimum the Captain should be expecting 25% and his senior officers should share another 25%...

Fighting Defensively/Total Defense

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/fighting-defensivelytotal-defense>

October 12, 2013

Tag: Q&A

CharlesDM wrote:

ACKS does not have the options of fighting defensively or total defense. I don't remember the first edition to include these options, but I'd guess Player's Option ("2.5"), if not sooner.

I just wanted to ask the Autarchs if these options were considered and excluded.

I've pulled the options from the SRD, slightly adapted to ACKS terminology below.

If included, what do you think about them being considered (two separate) Special Maneuvers that might benefit from a custom Combat Trickery proficiency selection (-2/+2 or +6, respectively).

Thanks!

"You can choose to fight defensively when attacking. If you do so, you take a -4 penalty on all attacks in a round to gain a +2 to AC until the start of your next round.

You can choose to totally defend yourself in lieu of attacking, gaining a +4 to AC until the start of your next round.

You can't combine total defense with fighting defensively."

If you want to implement Defensive Fighting, I would make it the mirror opposite of Charge:

- You cannot move
- You gain +2 AC
- You suffer -2 to hit

How Do You Handle Extracting Incapacitated Combatants from Engagement?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/how-do-you-handle-extracting-incapacitated-combatants-engagement>

October 24, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Beragon wrote:

Another situation I recall in our last session - it was the same combat where a PC charged and Knocked Down a powerful adversary, with the remaining PCs attempting to swarm him while he was down, in the subsequent 2 rounds.

During that fight, one of the 4 PCs went down while engaged with the enemy. The remaining PCs wanted one of their number to drag him out of melee and look him over. After doing so, the "dragger" returned to engagement and another PC went down. One of the two remaining PCs dragged the 2nd downed character out to look him over.

How would you handle this situation, as I can see it happening a lot in the future? Obviously, the players wanted to take advantage of tending to a fallen combatant within 1 round of falling to gain the +2 bonus.

I gave the players the benefit of my doubt in this case, but I'm not sure I ran it as intended to be run, and I'd rather have a clearer answer in the future.

The "official rule" would be that the PC-dragger would have to first use either a movement or an attack action to "pick up" the fallen character. The fallen character's weight would be added to his encumbrance, reducing his movement probably to 60' or 30'. On the character's next round, he could then conduct a withdrawal.

There are two simpler ways you could handle it:

- 1) Allow the "dragger" to grab his friend and withdraw up to his combat movement carrying his fallen comrade, but treat this as a full retreat;
- 2) Allow the "dragger" to conduct an Overrun special maneuver to escape with the body of the fallen.

I personally use option #1.

Automatic Failure/Success

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/automatic-failuresuccess>

November 19, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Nick Dalton wrote:

Which checks yield an auto success on a 20 and an auto failure on a 1? The text confirms this for thief proficiencies and attack rolls. The text says a 1 in an automatic failure on a break door check, but that seems to be about it.

What about saving throws? What about proficiencies in general?

Thanks.

There's no answer in the rules-as-written, unfortunately. In actual play, I have always ruled that for anything labeled a "throw", a natural 1 is an automatic failure and a natural 20 is an automatic success. This would include saving throws, proficiency throws, attack throws, etc.

If there is ever an ACKS 2nd edition I will make this explicit.

Reaction Rolls - Modifiers and “Stacking”

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/reaction-rolls-modifiers-and-stacking>

December 12, 2013

Tag: **New Material**

Nick Dalton wrote:

I have a couple of questions about reaction rolls. In this post (<http://new.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/reaction-roll-timing>), the timing was given as follows:

The official rule is:

Make a reaction roll after surprise is resolved. Add the following modifiers immediately:

CHA of the highest CHA character

Mystic Aura

*Circumstantial modifiers at Judge's discretion**

Add the following modifiers only if conversation ensues:

Diplomacy

Intimidation

Seduction

**EXAMPLE: If an adventurer enters an NPC's house with a bloody sword in one hand and the NPC's wife's severed head in the other, impose a significant penalty on the reaction roll.*

My questions are:

1. It doesn't seem that difficult to get a bonus of +4 with a decent CHA (+2) and any of the several proficiencies that grant a +2 bonus on this roll. That would mean that the worst reaction you could get is "neutral, uncertain". Is that the intent?

The reaction roll table is almost exactly the same as in B/X, but in B/X the highest CHA bonus to this roll was a +2 and there were no proficiencies as you know.

(Perhaps an initial roll should be made without any modifiers before the PCs can speak?)

2. I'm assuming you cannot stack reaction roll proficiencies, except in the case of Mystic Aura plus any one of Diplomacy, Intimidation, and Seduction, correct?

3. *Why would one take Intimidation over Diplomacy given the restrictions of the former? I'm guessing the answer is something like, "some monsters are not interested in diplomacy," but wanted to check.*

I have been working on some advanced rules for Reaction Rolls to address these problems.

RULES

1. Make an initial Reaction Roll using either the DIPLOMACY INTIMIDATION or SEDUCTION modifiers, depending on the context and the player's stated stances and actions. The player character's roleplay should determine which applies.

2. Additional reaction rolls modify the attitude attained by the first reaction roll.

3. An additional reaction roll (of any type) may be made after 1 round of interaction. A second reaction roll (of any type) may be made after 1 minute (6 rounds) of interaction. A third reaction roll may be made after 1 turn of interaction. A fourth reaction roll may be made after 1 hour of interaction. Additional reaction rolls require 1 hour of interaction, but cannot be made more than once per day.

DIPLOMACY Modifiers

Alignment

Character believed to be Lawful; target is Lawful or Neutral +1

Character believed to be Lawful; target is Chaotic -1

Character believed to be Chaotic; target is Lawful or Neutral -2

Character's race is a historical enemy of target -2

Location

Character is trespassing in target's lair -1

Character is in own lair +1

Authority

Character has legal authority over target (lord, guard, etc) +2 or more

Character owes target favors -1 / unrequited favor

Target has authority over character -1 or more

Target owes character favors +1 / unrequited favor

Proficiencies

Character has Charisma Modifier +Modifier

Character has Diplomacy and is attempting to parley +2

Character has Mystic Aura +2

Threat

Character is brandishing weapon -1

Target believes character has harmed friends -2

Target has witnessed or has evidence that character harm friends -5

Target has been subject to previous intimidation attempt by character -1 / prior intimidation

Relationship

Target is already Hostile -2

Target is already Unfriendly -1

Target is already Indifferent +1

Reaction to Diplomacy

Adjusted Roll Result

2- Hostile, attacks // shifts 2 attitudes negative

3-5 Unfriendly, may attack // shifts 1 attitude negative

6-8 Neutral, uncertain // shifts 1 attitude towards neutral

9-11 Indifferent, uninterested // shifts 1 attitude positive

12+ Friendly, helpful // shifts 2 attitudes toward positive

EXAMPLE: A party of 1st level adventurers has just slain five orcs. Their bodies litter the floor and the adventurers' weapons are covered with orc-gore. When ten more orcs enter the room, the adventurers opt to parley. The paladin (CHA 18, Mystic Aura, Diplomacy, +7 total) steps forward. "We come in peace!" he says in orcish.

The characters are believed to be of Lawful alignment and the target is Chaotic (-1); the character's are trespassing in the target's lair (-1); the characters are brandishing weapons (-1); the targets have evidence that the character harmed his friends (-5), for a total of -8. The total modifier is therefore +7-8=-1.

The Judge rolls 2d6-1, and gets a 9. The total of 8 results in a "Neutral" response. "If you come in peace, why'd you kill our friends?" says the orc. The paladin and the orc now begin to interact (1 combat round / 10 seconds). The paladin continues diplomacy, saying "They attacked us! It must have been a mistake. Let's talk to your chief to sort this out."

The Judge nods and rolls 2d6+8-7; the dice yield an unpleasant result of 3. This modifies to a 2, resulting in a shift in attitude by two categories, from "Neutral" to "Hostile". The orcs draw their weapons, shouting "He wants to kill the chief!"

Let's assume instead that the Judge rolled an 11, modified to 10. This shifts the orc's attitude by one category, to "Indifferent". The orc gang leader says, "Eh, Aghrimun always was stupid, knew he'd get himself killed some day. Not sure I wanna bother the chief right now, but you can go find him yourself if you want."

The paladin decides to continue parleying. This will take 1 minute (6 rounds of interaction). His modifier is now 2d6+8-6, because he gains a +1 from the target being Indifferent. The paladin decides to make fun of Aghrimun's weakness and then says they should all go have a laugh about it with the chief. The dice yield a result of 5, modified to a 7, resulting in a shift in attitude by one category towards "Neutral". This reverts the orcs towards Neutral. "I ain't got no interest in cracking jokes with the likes of you," says the orc gangleader. "Get out of here before I decide I want to crack your skull."

INTIMIDATION Modifiers

- Character and party members outnumber target(s) +1
- Character and party members outnumber target(s) by 3:2 or more +2
- Character and party members outnumber target(s) by 3:1 or more +5
- Character is in own lair +1
- Character is brandishing weapon +1
- Character is brandishing magic items +1
- Character has target at disadvantage (blackmail, tied up) +2 or more
- Character has legal authority over target +2 or more
- Character is significantly higher level than target (3+ HD) +2

Target

- Target's Morale Score -score
- Target has witnessed character kill or torture target's associates +1
- Target is in own lair -1
- Target is armed -1
- Target has spells or magic items available -1
- Target and friends outnumber character and party members -1
- Target and friends outnumber character and party members by 3:2 or more -2*
- Target and friends outnumber character and party members by 3:1 or more -5*
- Target has character at disadvantage (trump card, helpless) -5
- Target has legal authority over character -2 or more
- Target is significantly higher level than character (3+ HD) -2
- Target believes he will suffer loss of face if submits -2 or more
- Target believes he will be horrendously punished or killed if he submits -5 or more**
- *If target is in lair, include number in lair as part of friends
- **"The Dark Lord will do far worse things to me than you ever would" factor

Proficiencies

Character has Charisma Modifier +Modifier

Character has Intimidation and either legal authority, outnumber, or outlevels target +2

Character has Mystic Aura +2

Relationship

Target is already Hostile -2

Target is already Unfriendly -1

Target is already Fearful +1

Reaction to Intimidation

Adjusted Roll Result

2- Hostile, attacks

3-5 Unfriendly, may attack

6-8 Neutral, uncertain

9-11 Fearful, attempts to withdraw / escape if possible

12+ Cowed, helpful

EXAMPLE: A party of 1st level adventurers has just slain five orcs. Their bodies litter the floor and the adventurers' weapons are covered with orc-gore. When ten more orcs enter the room, the adventurers opt to parley. The thief (CHA 18, Mystic Aura, Intimidation, +7 total) steps forward. "Drop your weapons if you don't want the same to happen to you, bitches" he says in orcish.

The characters are brandishing weapons (+1) and have some visible magic items (+1) but are not of substantially higher level and have no legal authority (0). The orcs are in their own lair (-1), are brandishing weapons (-1), and including friends in their lair outnumber the characters by more than 3:1 (-5). However they can see that the PCs have killed some friends (+1). Their chieftain is alive, giving them ML +2 (-2). The total modifiers are $+7+1+1-1-1-5+1=+1$.

The Judge rolls $2d6+1$, and gets an 11. The adjusted total of 12 results in a "Cowed" response. The orcs drop their weapons. "We surrender!" they shout, dropping their weapons. "Take us to your chief," the thief orders.

The characters reach the orc chief and seek to intimidate him as well. "Time to leave these caves, chief. This place is ours now," says the thief. The characters are brandishing weapons (+1) and have some visible magic items (+1) but have no legal authority (0). The orc chief is in his own lair (-1), brandishing a weapon (-1), and has troops that outnumber the characters by more than 3:1 (-5). He knows that the PCs have killed some friends (+1). But he is 4HD, substantially higher level than the party (-1), has access to a witch doctor (-1), and will suffer loss of face if he submits to the adventurers (-2). With the chief alive, the orc morale is +2 (-2). The total modifiers are +7+1+1-1-1-5+1-1-1-2-2=-3.

The Judge rolls 2d6-1 and gets a 6. The adjusted total of 3 results in an "Unfriendly" response from the chief and other new orcs in the room. "I'll give you 10 seconds to get the hell out of my caverns, and then I start eating human-flesh," says the Chief.

Meanwhile, the same result means that the currently cowed orcs have their attitudes adjusted downward by one category, from "Cowed" to "Fearful". They begin to slink towards the sides of the room, hoping no one pays attention to them.

SEDUCTION Modifiers

Age

Character is of younger age category than target attracted to youthful mates +1/category

Character is of younger age category than target attracted to mature mates -1/category

Character is of older age category than target attracted to mature mates +1/category

Character is of older age category than target attracted to mature mates +1/category

*Age categories only apply within Youth to Old range.

Status

Character has higher social status than target +1/noble rank or equivalent

Character is substantially higher level than target +1

Character is substantially lower level than target -1

Kink

Character is of a race which particularly appeals to target +1 or more

Character is of a race which is unappealing to target -1 or more

Character's clothing is particularly appealing to target +1 or more

Character's clothing is particularly unappealing to target -1 or more

Character's physical traits are particularly appealing to target +1 or more

Character's physical traits are particularly unappealing to target -1 or more

Character's behavioral traits are particularly appealing to target +1 or more

Character's behavioral traits are particularly unappealing to target -1 or more

Privacy

Character and target are alone +1

Characters and target are in front of target's friends -1

Proficiencies

Character demonstrates Performance or Art proficiency +1

Character has Mystic Aura +2

Character has Seduction and otherwise at least +1 in modifiers +2

Relationship History

Character already Infuriated -2

Character already Insulted -1

Character already Attracted +1

Character already Smitten +2

Character has taken advantage of target's friends in the past -1

Character has taken advantage of target in the past -2

Target would be at personal risk from liaison with character -2 or more

Reaction to Seduction

Adjusted Roll Result

2- Hostile, attacks/insults/has friend beat you up

3-5 Unfriendly, may attack/insult/have friend beat you up

6-8 Neutral, indifferent

9-11 Attracted, hints at interest

12+ Smitten, helpful

MichaelPfaff then wrote:

This looks super nifty, but I can't imagine using this at a game table, except maybe in the most complex of negotiations. Even then, tracking the histories with modifiers for each PC and NPC they deal with... oh my...

I wouldn't mind seeing a more streamlined version of these rules that takes into account NPC starting disposition. But, consulting this chart just makes my eyes glaze over. :)

Hah, it's definitely eye-glaze-inducing. Here's my thought process on such tables.

1. As Judge, you will inevitably be called on to make assessments of reaction rolls in intricate or complex situations.

-
2. In such situations you can either
- a) make it up out of thin air
 - b) estimate it based on guidelines
 - c) strictly follow a table

3. If you want to strictly follow a table we've provided a table.

4. If you want to estimate it based on guidelines, you can read the table a few times and then use it as an implicit benchmark for your own estimates.

Put another way, one could think of the table as a series of "case studies" of situations and how the Judge evaluated it, and get the same outcome.

Closing Opponents

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/closing-opponents>

January 24, 2014

Tag: Q&A

farmcodegary wrote:

Can someone explain this paragraph?

"A combatant using a weapon with a long reach (spears, for instance) may choose to attack a closing opponent on the closing opponent's number and thus attack simultaneously with the opponent, even if the combatant rolled lower for initiative. Likewise, if a combatant has a missile weapon readied at the beginning of round and is not engaged in melee, he can fire at a closing opponent on the closing opponent's number even if the combatant rolled lower for initiative."

What is a closing opponent?

The exact "definition" of closing opponent is an opponent who begins his initiative number unengaged with you and moves such that he is now engaged with you.

If you have a higher initiative number, you can simply attack first. This rule allows you to attack simultaneously if you have a lower initiative number.

Overrun is Awesome (?)

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/overrun-awesome>

July 11, 2012

Tag: Q&A

CharlesDM wrote:

I had a situation where a PC used Overrun to escape what looked like ... certain doom. I want to make sure I understand Overrun. (At the risk of over-complicating matters, I'm asking everything I can think of regarding Overrun to learn your intent.)

If I understand correctly, the only significant limitation to Overrun is that you can't move (other than Defensive movement) when engaged (so Overrun is right out). Similarly, because you cannot move after attacking, an engaged character cannot drop the opponent engaging them and then Overrun one or more opponents more than 5' away.

However, if a character begins unengaged, and is lucky, they can Overrun through a wall of opponents to the full extent of their movement, correct?

(I like this, but wonder if there should be a maximum number of Overruns allowed equal to the maximum number of Cleaves for a given character.)

In the case of simultaneous initiative, an opponent is moving to engage a currently unengaged character -- that character could Overrun the opponent to avoid engagement, correct?

Is a character engaged if they are 10' away from a wielder of a second-rank weapon?

Do you know of a good defense against Overruns?

Thank you for your help!

APM: A few words behind the philosophy of engagement and overrun. ACKS attempts to encourage formation fighting and combined arms. For example, in ACKS its a very viable tactic to have a front row of heavily-armored sword-and-shield, a second row of lightly-armored spear, and a third row of spellcasters. The rules are structured such that it's hard to get to the spellcasters. Because any hit will interrupt spell-casting, it means that mages need warriors to protect them if they're to be valuable in battle.

ACKS: I know that 3.5 had similar design goals, but I felt it's approach was sub-par. The AoO mechanic was a very slow and tedious means of creating zones of control. Moreover, tumbling was far too easy for characters past mid-level who cared about the skill at all. In ACKS we reverted to a true zone of control system (the 5' engagement system) inspired by old wargame-style mechanics. Overrun then becomes necessary as a technique to overcome the zone of control. I wanted a system that allowed, e.g., a high HD creature to be more effective at exerting a zone of control than a low HD creature, and basing it on saving throws proved a good choice.

If I understand correctly, the only significant limitation to Overrun is that you can't move (other than Defensive movement) when engaged (so Overrun is right out).

APM: That's not actually correct. An Overrun is a special maneuver, not a movement. You can begin engaged and attempt an overrun. If you succeed, you can start moving past the creature that was engaging you. If more than one creature was engaging you, though, you'd have to overrun them all.

Similarly, because you cannot move after attacking, an engaged character cannot drop the opponent engaging them and then Overrun one or more opponents more than 5' away.

APM: That is correct.

However, if a character begins unengaged, and is lucky, they can Overrun through a wall of opponents to the full extent of their movement, correct?

APM: You'd have to be quite lucky...As others have pointed out, each opponent can make a saving throw to attempt to block the character.

In the case of simultaneous initiative, an opponent is moving to engage a currently unengaged character -- that character could Overrun the opponent to avoid engagement, correct?

APM: Yes

Is a character engaged if they are 10' away from a wielder of a second-rank weapon?

APM: No

Do you know of a good defense against Overruns?

APM: A scrum of 3-4 defenders, one of whom is statistically likely to either not be hit, or to make his saving throw, usually does the trick.

CharlesDM then wrote:
ARISE! [thread necromancy]

After all this time, I have one more clarification on Overrun. When an Overrun attack throw fails (i.e. the opponent doesn't need to make a saving throw to block the combatant), may the combatant still melee attack the Overrun target? Or does the Overrun attempt count as/expend an attack?

ACKS says "A successful overrun does not count as a combatant's attack ..."

Also, an unsuccessful overrun does not count as a combatant's attack?

And a related question:

Can a character engaged in melee attempt an Acrobatics proficiency throw to tumble behind that opponent in melee?

If not, could the character attempt an Overrun out of melee, and if successful, then attempt an Acrobatics proficiency throw to tumble behind that opponent?

CharlesDM, short answer is "YES, you can use Acrobatics while engaged. That is, in fact, its whole point."

The interplay of the rules is as follows:

DEFENSIVE MOVEMENT

"Once two opposing combatants are within 5' of each other, they are engaged in melee. Engaged combatants may not move except to perform defensive movement."

****Note that the types of defensive movement are "withdrawal" and "retreat".****

OTHER MOVEMENT

"Instead of moving (or running, charging, setting, withdrawing, or retreating), combatants may perform a simple action that could be accomplished while fighting, such as standing up from being knocked down, sheathing one weapon and drawing another, readying or loosing a shield, picking an item off the ground, or retrieving an item from a pack or sack."

****Note that you can conduct simple actions instead of "moving", and the "moving" it can be instead of includes "withdrawing" and "retreating", which is to say, defensive movement. Therefore a combatant engaged in melee can sheathe a weapon and draw another, or ready a shield, etc.****

ACROBATICS

"In lieu of moving during a round, the character may attempt a proficiency throw of 20+ to tumble behind an opponent in melee."

****The phrase "in lieu of moving" and "instead of moving" are interchangeable in the rules. Therefore Acrobatics should be understood to be a simple action that can be accomplished "instead of moving", so it can be conducted while engaged.****

Jard then wrote:

This seems to be in conflict (or I may be misreading) with a clarification on knockdown, wherein engaging someone who is knocked down meant they couldn't spend their move action to stand up since engaged combatants can't move. If that's not the case, knocking down would be quite weak as the combatant can simply stand up immediately every time on their turn.

Aryxymaraki then wrote:

For those who haven't seen it, the knockdown clarification:

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/non-movement-movement>

(I was wondering about that too, but personally, I think I'd just make an exception for Acrobatics without any clarification, since it seems so obviously useless if you can't do it in melee.)

My earlier explanation is in direct contradiction to the written text of the rules, which states... "Instead of withdrawing, or retreating.... combatants may perform a simple action that could be accomplished while fighting, such as standing up from being knocked down..."

In my own knockdown clarification I said "The rules are not exceptionally well-written in this case, and I apologize for the confusion... Being knocked down in a melee should be one of the worst things that can happen to a combatant."

Here is an attempt to update the language to clarify both issues:

OTHER MOVEMENT

Instead of moving, running, charging, or setting for charge, combatants may perform a simple action that could be accomplished in a few seconds, such as standing up from being knocked down, sheathing one weapon and drawing another, readying or loosing a shield, picking an item off the ground, or retrieving an item from a pack or sack. Characters with Acrobatics proficiency may tumble instead of moving.

Instead of withdrawing or retreating, combatants may perform a simple action that could be accomplished while fighting, such as sheathing one weapon and drawing another, readying or loosing a shield, or picking an item off the ground, or retrieving an item from a pack or sack. Characters with Acrobatics proficiency may tumble instead of withdrawing or retreating.

Simply dropping a weapon and drawing a new one does not count as movement during a round.

Simultaneous Action's Effects on Movement and Targeting

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/simultaneous-actions-effects-movement-and-targeting>

May 24, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Boomishtendency wrote:

I have a question about the order of resolution when a PC and opponent have equal initiative in a given round. Page 100 of the manual state that combatant with equal numbers act simultaneously. This is pretty straightforward when two combatants are both engaged and choose to attack, one simply resolves both attacks and deals damage accordingly. However, when opponents are not engaged it gets slightly more muddled.

Assuming a player or monster have declared retreat prior to initiative but rolls initiative equal to a pursuer. If the retreat movement would take the retreating entity out of the pursuing entity's charge range but they move simultaneously, does the attack still go through?

Assume there is a wounded character, a defending fighter, and an attacking monster. The defending fighting and the monster roll an identical, higher initiative number than the wounded character. If the monster attempts to move to engage the wounded character is the defending fighter also allowed to move to intercept and engage the attacking monster?

Assuming identical initiative, if the movements of a ranged attack target would cause the range increment to change, do we measure the distance according to the target's original space, end space, or the mean of both?

Perhaps a better way to put example two is: Do we resolve the status effect "engaged" any time any hostile character moves within 5' of another or just at the end of a movement? If the former, whenever two actors could move simultaneously, then any "intercepting" action might serve to negate an attackers ability to move to their designated target.

You would resolve the effect of "engaged" any time a hostile character moves within 5' of another.

EXAMPLE: Athelstan stands in the middle of a 10' wide corridor. An ogre is 30' north of him, and Clovis, a badly wounded mage, is 30' south of him. The ogre acts first, and charges towards Clovis (60' away). The ogre cannot reach Clovis because it will become engaged by Athelstan - there is no way to pass him in the corridor without getting within 5'.

If a combatant wants to move through an opponent without stopping to fight him, this is an overrun. In the example above, the ogre could overrun Athelstan to get to Clovis.

A more complex example would be as follows:

EXAMPLE: Athelstan stands in the middle of a 10' wide corridor. An ogre is 60' north of him, and Clovis, a badly wounded mage, is 15' north of him. Athelstan and the ogre act simultaneously. The ogre charges towards Clovis (45' away from it) and Athelstan moves forward to protect Clovis. Athelstan's movement rate is 60' and the ogre is 90' per round.

The rules as written do not address this situation clearly. When it arises in my own campaigns, I typically will estimate where the two combatants would end up based on their relative movement rates and the distances involved.

So in the example above, I might start by having each combatant move 1/6th of his movement. The ogre would advance 15', and be 30' north of Clovis. Athelstan would advance 10' and be 5' south of Clovis. Since they weren't engaged yet, I'd repeat. The ogre would advance another 15' and be 15' north of Clovis, and Athelstan would advance another 10', and be 5' north of Clovis. Since there's still no engagement, so I'd repeat, advancing them perhaps 1/24th of their movement. The ogre would advance 3.75' and Athelstan would advance 2.5' feet, putting the ogre at 11.25' north of Clovis and Athelstan at 7.5' north of Clovis - engaged.

This is more-or-less the method Car Wars uses to resolve phased movement of vehicles. It's very slow, but precise. I don't mind doing arithmetic in play for important fights, but many people dislike it. You could use this as a simple rule instead:

Have the simultaneous combatants roll a tie-breaker. Give a +1 bonus to the combatant with the faster movement rate, and another +1 bonus to the combatant who is closer to his desired final position.

Your examples:

Assuming a player or monster have declared retreat prior to initiative but rolls initiative equal to a pursuer. If the retreat movement would take the retreating entity out of the pursuing entity's charge range but they move simultaneously, does the attack still go through?

If you use my mathematical method, the pursuer would get an attack off. If you use the tie-breaking method, the two combatants would make a tie-breaker. The retreator would get +1 (for faster initiative) but the pursuer would get +1 (because he has less distance to move than the retreator, as he is already in position to attack, e.g. he needn't move at all to attack).

Assume there is a wounded character, a defending fighter, and an attacking monster. The defending fighter and the monster roll an identical, higher initiative number than the wounded character. If the monster attempts to move to engage the wounded character is the defending fighter also allowed to move to intercept and engage the attacking monster? If you use the mathematical method, it would be based on the geometry of their positions and their respective movement rates. With the tie-breaking method, you'd roll dice.

Assuming identical initiative, if the movements of a ranged attack target would cause the range increment to change, do we measure the distance according to the target's original space, end space, or the mean of both?

If you use the mathematical method I'd probably base the range on one-half of the target's movement rate. If you use the tie-breaking method you'd roll dice.

These sort of situations are by far the most complex and difficult for any initiative system to resolve.

Crowdsourcing Trap Searching

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/crowdsourcing-trap-searching>

June 15, 2014

Tag: Q&A

susan_brindle wrote:

*So, I finally started running ACKS again, and on the very first dungeon, the party wanted to search a particular door for traps. They reasoned that since everyone else would have to sit around anyway, they might as well *all* look for traps, since all characters succeed on 18+*

Six PCs, plus two-three henchmen each... the door wasn't even trapped, but throwing 20 dice at something seems absurd. I feel like this can't be the intended system, but I didn't see any rule against multiple PCs searching for traps, or a system like with strength checks where the crowd adds a bonus instead of rolling separately.

Great question! I didn't say so explicitly, but the implicit mechanic restraining the "20 person search" behavior is that traps can be triggered by searches or failed searches.

In ACKS, "traps have specific triggers, whether it is opening a door or walking over a particular area. Every time an adventurer takes an action that could trigger a trap, the Judge should roll 1d6. A result of 1-2 indicates that the trap springs."

The exact nature of the trap will determine whether even attempting a search risks triggering it; your party could very well trigger 20d6 rolls! And certainly a natural roll of 1 on a failed search could trigger almost any trap. "Oops! I just tripped and shoved on the door knob!"

Also, a typical 10' x 10' area can be filled by no more than 9 adventurers, one of whom would be in the middle of the other 8, so I wouldn't let more than 8 people search a 10' x 10' area in 1 turn in any case.

Weight of Stone Adventurers

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/weight-stone-adventurers>

July 30, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Nerdnumber1 wrote:

My party ran into some trouble with a medusa. We killed it, but not without a few complications regarding a large portion of our low-level party.

Does anyone have a good estimate of the weight/encumbrance (in stone) of a human-sized stone statue, like you'd get after a petrification attack? I have some logistical issues to iron out regarding moving some "statues" through a dungeon, back to town, and possibly cross country...

The difference is not as much as you'd think. A 200lb man becomes a 500lb statue.

Granite weighs 165lbs per cubic foot. Flesh weighs around 65lbs per cubic foot. Therefore when a creature is transformed from flesh to stone, its weight should be multiplied by about 2.5.

Gaining XP When Henchmen are Away

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/gaining-xp-when-henchmen-are-away>

July 31, 2014

Tag: **Q&A**

SaruSama wrote:

How do the loot/xp share rules work when the henchman isn't there for some reason when you return to civilization? Say you sent them off ahead to try and warn the populace of an approaching army or something. Do you have to carry around their percentage of the loot or can you hand wave it and say you sold it and held on to their share which you give them next time they see you?

Unless you enjoy accounting for accounting's sake, I would hand-wave it.

Sneaky Lighting

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/sneaky-lighting>

September 26, 2014

Tag: Q&A

nDervish wrote:

I played a lot of D&D from the late 70s to early 90s and consider myself mostly an "old school" kind of guy. Some of my players weren't even born then and most of them come from a background of 3.x, storygames, and computer "RPGs". I'm trying to get them turned on to the older playstyles, but there's one major issue that they complain about endlessly which I don't have a good answer for:

The visibility of light.

Most of their characters are level 3-4, with a couple just starting to hit 5 (note that we converted these characters from Savage Worlds and they started at level 3-4; they haven't clawed their way up from level 1) and they have a hard time finding something they feel up to doing. "We can't explore the wilderness because everything is too tough at our level and we can't go into dungeons because everything can see in the dark except us, so we need light, which they can see coming from a mile away and makes it impossible for us to be sneaky."

How have others dealt with this? Do you handwave it and say that dungeons are naturally illuminated, so the PCs don't need to give themselves away by carrying lights? Do you have all tool-using monsters carry lights at all times, even though they don't need them? Do you tell your players "you're supposed to be at a disadvantage in the mythic underworld, so just suck it up and roll a new character when you die"?

I have really mixed feelings on infravision, blind-fighting, and more.

Darkness Penalties: On the one hand, having spelunked and had a battery in a flashlight go dead, I can attest that the darkness is indeed absolute, total, and paralyzing. I find it hard to imagine I could do anything in such a condition. On the other hand, characters like Zatoichi the Blind Swordsman demand that blindness not be utterly punitive. Moreover, if blindness is too incapacitating, then simple spells like Darkness become devastating.

Infravision: I almost changed the name of this to Darkvision, and I do not recall why I didn't. I think because I was enamored of close compatibility with LL/BX. The fact that I did not give dwarves and elves infravision should show that I was not very enamored of infravision, though! I did leave the monsters as possessing infravision, largely so that the Judge can run dungeons without having to worry about light sources here and there; it's binary: the monsters can see in the dark, the PCs can't and bring light with them. In any case, it's not infrared, though my Cyberpunk-weaned players constantly try to use it as such. Advanced Adventurer Conqueror King (LOL) will have better rules for darkvision.

Dungeon Movement - Already Explored?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/dungeon-movement-already-explored>

October 07, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Weron wrote:

How fast does a party move through a part of a dungeon they have already explored?

Time and movement, p 92, defines 3 types of movement in a dungeon:

Exploration movement: 120' per turn.

Combat movement: 40' per round, ($40 * 60 = 2400'$ per turn, 20x exploration movement)

Running movement: 3x combat movement.

It seems that if you just want to rush through a dungeon, you should use combat movement. But what are the rules/consequences of not using exploration movement? If there are any consequences, is there a reasonable speed between combat move and exploration move when you are no longer exploring, but moving through explored sections on a later visit to the dungeon, that doesn't have consequences?

Combat movement would be appropriate, yes.

The consequences would be that you give up the opportunity to (a) detect traps on 18+ and (b) spot secret doors (if an elf or Alertness-proficient character), or (c) detect sloping corridors and stonework (if a dwarf).

Chapter 7: Campaigns

Cost of Roads

<http://autarch.co/forum/cost-roads-0>

February 20, 2012

Tag: Q&A

MichaelPfaff wrote:

Looking for feedback on this.

How much would 1 mile of paved road probably cost?

After some additional research I was able to source the cost of standard Roman roads at 10,000 sesterce per mile. A sesterce is 4 copper asses, and in the assumptions of ACKS, 1 copper ass is equivalent to 1 copper piece. Therefore the cost of a road is 40,000cp per mile, or 400gp. A standard Roman road was 8' wide.

The following can be considered an official rule:

Road, leveled earth (8' wide, 1 mile long)	100gp
Road, leveled earth (10' wide, 1 mile long)	125gp
Road, gravel (8' wide, 1 mile long)	200gp
Road, gravel (10' wide, 1 mile long)	250gp
Road, paved (8' wide, 1 mile long)	400gp
Road, paved (10' wide, 1 mile long)	500gp

Multiply the base cost of the road by the terrain movement multiplier:

Desert, hills, wooded areas x3/2

Thick jungle, swamps, mountains x2

EXAMPLE: Quintus wishes to construct an 8' wide gravel road through 4 miles of mountains. The cost is (400gp/miles) x (4 miles) x 2 (terrain) 3,200gp.

Construction of roads can be considered investment into a domain for purposes of attracting peasants.

Labor Fees & Construction

<http://autarch.co/forum/cost-roads-0>

February 17, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

In the middle of the discussion about the Cost of Roads, MichaelPfaff wrote:

Are laborers fees and whatnot assumed to be included in the cost of building castles and buildings? Or, should that be an added cost that doesn't impact the build time?

Labor fees are assumed to be included in the cost of building castles and buildings, so you needn't track it.

Roads and Maintenance

<http://autarch.co/forum/cost-roads-0>

April 19, 2012

Tag: Q&A

In the middle of the discussion about the Cost of Roads, brennall wrote:

Sorry to resurrect this excellent but old topic.

I wondered if the cost of the road would be added to the cost of the stronghold for monthly ongoing maintenance purposes?

Or should it just be assumed to happen and forgotten?

Brennall, you can either consider the road part of the stronghold (a military expense) or part of the domain (an investment).

If you consider it part of the stronghold then it will need to be maintained (per stronghold upkeep), but by adding to stronghold value it will increase the size of the domain that the stronghold can secure. These would be "military roads".

If you consider it part of the domain, then it would not need to be maintained, and it would attract new peasants. But it would not help the stronghold's value, so the maximum size of the domain would not be increased. This would represent a lord commissioning roads, but then handing them off to private merchants and so on to run.

Hordes and Nomads

<http://autarch.co/forum/hordes-and-nomads-0>

August 20, 2011

Tag: Q&A

sean wills wrote:

How would you model the effects of a mobile population on the land's resources ?

Great question. Nomadic pastoralists tend to have a low population density, and tend to be semi-sedentary, moving once each season as they migrate with their herds.

The key element to understanding pastoralism is that the land is not what's valuable. Speaking in very broad terms, nomadic pastoralism tends to occur only where the land is unsuitable for agriculture, such as the Mongolian steppe, or portions of Africa. Instead, what's valuable is the herd.

We know from ACKS that 1 peasant farmer and his family farm 30 acres of farmland. 30 acres of farmland costs an average of 1,500gp in ACKS. Let's assume that a pastoral family of 1 herder and his family need 1,500gp in livestock.

So let's say that a pastoral family can extract the Land Value of any unoccupied area as long as they have a herd of 1,500gp. If they have less than that size herd, they get proportionately less gp. Pastoralists don't have to secure a domain and they don't have to have minimum strongholds.

(Is that realistic? Interestingly enough, courses.washington.edu offers a course on pastoralism that gives a sample household herd: 25 cattle, 10 camels, 100 goats, 10 donkeys. In ACKS terms that's 250gp + 1000gp + 300gp + 80gp, or 1,630gp. So we are within the realm of reason.)

Because pastoralism takes more space, we'd divide the limits of growth by 4. A 6-mile hex can support 30 pastoral families, not 125. To keep them moving, let's say that they need to migrate every 3 months (one season) or the Land Value decreases by 1gp per month.

Using Mongolia as an example, we know it is 603,000 square miles in land mass. That's 18,843 6-mile hexes, with 1/4 being used at any given time (then the next 1/4th the next season, etc.). That means Mongolia could support 141,322 pastoral families, or 706,612 people. Mongolia has low Land Value, probably 3-4gp.

To make them bad-asses militarily, let's rule that each pastoral family can be conscripted to get 1 horse archer or light cavalry per family, rather than the 1-3 militia per 10 families that a peasant population can support. That would give them an army of 141,322 or so. (Historically the Mongols invaded Europe in 1241 with an army of 150,000).

In contrast, the same area of land (603,000 square miles), if it could be used for agriculture, could support 6,000,000 to 10,000,000 families.

Creating Magical Items & Special Components

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/creating-magical-items-special-components>

May 01, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

MichaelPfaff wrote:

We just had a Spellsword reach 5th level and start creating magical items from formulas and samples.

If a character is creating a magical item using a sample, and he gets to 50% of the work complete, and then learns of the special components (as the rules state on page 118) that requires adventuring time to get (say because the type of component is more expensive than the market allows), is all the work on that item lost? Or, can the Mage simply "pause" the work, go off to find the item, and then come back and complete it?

If magical research is interrupted like this, are there any negative side-effects?

My main concern is Mages losing their work after finding out the special component, which might require adventuring to find and use.

The mage can simply pause the work, go off find the item, and return to complete it.

Camel Trains

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/camel-trains>

May 17, 2012

Tag: Q&A

James C. Bennett wrote:

I was just wondering if anybody had run the numbers for replacing wagons with camels on mercantile ventures.

At 60 stone/camel vs. 640 stone/wagon, I'm running with a 10 camels = 1 wagon conversion rate. This leads to caravans of 100 to 400 camels, with one merchant and 4 guards in charge of every 20 camels. A quick Wikipedia search suggests Silk Road camel trains ran with up to 150 camels, with 1 handler per 16 camels. So, I'm not getting all that close to reality with this rule, but there were a lot fewer dragons and undead on the Silk Road than on the Desert wandering monster chart, so it's probably a push.

Does anyone see anything I might be missing?

Your conversion sounds fine to me. Caravans of 100 to 400 compares well to Silk Road trains of 150 camels. 1 merchant per 20 camels compares well to 1 handler per 16 camels.

The ACKS world is considerably more dangerous than the real world, so the larger number of guards is justified.

ACKS Economics in Later Periods

<http://autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/acks-economics-later-periods>

May 30, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Beedo wrote:

I think this might have been answered by Alex already, but I couldn't find the post. What kind of adjustments would need to be made for ACKS style economics to work in later ages, like the Renaissance or Early Modern? (And if it's just not a good fit, what are the reasons). One of the great things about ACKS is the implicit trust the economic numbers make sense, but I don't have a good head for it myself. Thanks for any insight!

Beedo,

In terms of trade/commerce, you don't need to change much. The mercantile system in ACKS is more akin to the Ancient Roman and/or Renaissance trade levels, anyway. Medieval trade was substantially less prevalent than ACKS would suggest.

In terms of land, you should increase the land value of peasants by 1-3gp per peasant to reflect improved agricultural techniques. That in turn will make your lords richer, which will allow for larger armies (30 Years War style), or more investment in cities, infrastructure, science, and so on.

There may be some experts on the Early Modern period with more specific details. My sense is that as long as you stay before the Industrial Revolution you'll be fine.

The Butcher then wrote:

Out of curiosity, if we were to assume "Dark Ages" levels of trade (say, anything between the Third Century Crisis Roman Empire and before the Fall of Constantinople), what changes to the system as written would be required the better to reflect this period?

According to the most recent works I've read, the levels of trade stayed fairly high until the Muslim Conquests. Up until those, the Mediterranean remained a navigable trading route and so the Roman-level shipping continued. Once the Islamic Caliphate seized the southern-half of the Mediterranean, it became bloody waters of Christian v. Muslims. That destroyed the trade routes that had sustained Antiquarian civilization. The collapse of trade made it impossible to sustain urban settlements, and caused a reversion to self-sufficient agricultural communities.

So for the period 700 to 1400, I'd consider the following changes:

- Reduce population densities (per Adjusting Population Density in ACKS). This will vary depending on region - England and Wales having a much lower population density than, say, Medieval France.
- Adjust the Urban Demographics to reflect dispersed settlement patterns and agrarian/pastoral realms (as per Adjusting Urban Demographics in ACKS). This will vary depending on region, too. Byzantium remained a large city, but most areas of Western Europe lost their large cities.
- Roll demand modifiers at 1d4-1d4 instead of 1d3-1d3, to represent sharper local variations in trade
- Halve the range of all trade routes to reflect more dangerous travel conditions
- Add an additional encounter check along trade routes for bandits/pirates

That would give an environment with smaller, poorer towns, poorly connected in most cases, with sharply differentiated prices for goods at different locations. Profit margins for successful traders would be higher, but gross profit would be limited by the small scale of the markets.

Purchasing Monster Components

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/purchasing-monster-components>

June 21, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

MichaelPfaff wrote:

When a Mage is crafting a magical item and wishes to purchase monster parts for components (say, hearts of 4 hill giants [600xp/gp each]), does that just use the normal Equipment Availability tables, or does that follow a different standard?

If I'm trying to buy a hill giant's heart (600gp), would it be 25% chance of one in a Class IV market?

The system will work however you'd like to structure it: Equipment, magic items, or trade goods. Your choice will just set the level of availability of parts.

In my own campaigns, I don't really have esoteric monster parts for sale at all. The adventurers end up gathering the parts of the creatures they kill for later use.

Cheap Keeps?

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/cheap-keeps>

July 16, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Thomas Weigel wrote:

Once again, I try to reverse engineer the assumptions, because I haven't learned my lesson. It looks like most buildings are constructed as a wall with the same circumference and thickness, multiplied by x5 for all of the various design complications and interior walls, stairs, floors, etc.

This works - with some rounding - for pretty much everything except the square keep. The square keep costs exactly the same as a wall of the same circumference, assuming a continued progression past 60' height. With the x5 multiplier, it would cost 390,000 gold (or, with the same rounding, 375,000 gold).

Is the keep's cost an errata? Or is there a factor I haven't considered? Or am I just plain wrong?

The stronghold construction costs in ACKS are based on the stronghold construction costs found in David Cook's Expert Rulebook on page X52. Those are, I believe, in some capacity, cribbed from either Gygax or Arneson's even earlier work.

ACKS has an implicit conversion rate of 1 silver piece = 1 silver penny (so 1.2gp per shilling, and 24gp per Lb). I used this conversion rate to price out about a dozen historical castles using ACKS and found they worked out to within 25% of the known historical prices, so I left them largely untouched.

I therefore wouldn't overly concern yourself with this. The "square keep" is likely the simplest form of building a castle-builder will undertake, and having it be cheap ends up leading to correctly-priced historical castles overall. The wall prices allow you to have walls meeting at weird angles and twisting in different directions, so it would make sense that you're "getting a discount".

Skimping on Upkeep

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/skimping-upkeep>

July 18, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

James C. Bennett wrote:

I have a nagging suspicion that this has already been asked and answered, but I haven't been able to find it in the forums, so here goes...

What happens if a ruler, faced with a domain with expenses that exceed revenue, decides to forego stronghold upkeep or urban upkeep?

The stronghold's effective value is reduced by the unpaid upkeep. The stronghold's upkeep cost is not reduced, however. (Like a big house, it doesn't get cheaper to maintain by not maintaining it!)

A stronghold's value has implications for the size of the domain that can be controlled as well as the defensibility of the stronghold during sieges.

That said, "there is a lot of ruin in a nation," as Burke once said. Likewise, a stronghold can last a long time with little upkeep.

Construction... Labor Costs?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/constructionlabor-costs>

June 5, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

One of my players wants to build a small house and palisade within a city's pale, but outside its walls. No problem, says I, assuming you get the right permissions from the duke, etc, etc.

One thing I said when he started computing costs was that he'd need to hire laborers. He contended that the cost listed in the construction section included laborers. And, to be fair, I didn't really see a section saying, you need X builders and Y time to make this happen (though I've not read that section as closely as I should perhaps).

So... do the construction costs include the cost of labor, or is that separate?

Construction cost includes labor cost. In Domains at War: Campaigns I explore this in considerably more detail. Here's the relevant excerpt.

Basic Rules for Construction

Chapter 7 of *Adventurer Conqueror King System* provides basic rules for construction of strongholds and related structures. These rules assume (1) that one engineer (250gp/month) is used per 100,000gp cost of the stronghold; and (2) that the time required to construct a stronghold depends entirely on its total price. For every 500gp it will take one day of game time. The basic rules allow for construction time to be reduced by 25% by paying 50% additional construction costs, or to be reduced by 50% by paying 100% additional construction costs. The construction time cannot be reduced by more than 50%.

These basic rules for construction are simple and easy to apply, but they are really only suitable when leaders have the leisure to gather a large, well-trained work force. Wartime construction efforts are virtually always pressed for time and/or short on skilled labor, which necessitates a more flexible approach to construction, described below.

Advanced Rules for Construction

When using the advanced rules, characters may pursue many types of **construction projects**. Construction projects include stronghold construction, ship building, siege engine manufacture, field fortification, and mining/sapping.

Each construction project has a **construction cost**. A project's construction cost is equal to the base cost of the project in gold pieces. For example, a keep has a construction cost of 75,000gp while a heavy catapult has a construction cost of 800gp.

The construction cost is paid by the labor of **construction workers**. Each day, each worker contributes a gp value of construction towards the construction cost. This amount is known as the **construction rate**. A worker's construction rate is normally identical to his wage rate.

Workers may be unskilled laborers and/or craftsmen. Unskilled laborers might be peasants, slaves, prisoners, conscripts, or even mercenaries on labor detail. Each unskilled laborer has a wage rate and construction rate of 3gp per month or 1sp per day. Craftsmen have considerably higher wage rates and construction rates. As detailed in the **Proficiency** section of ACKS, an apprentice craftsman can construct 10gp per month, a journeyman craftsman can construct 20gp per month, and a master craftsman can construct 40gp per month. Master craftsmen can also manage up to 2 journeymen and 4 apprentices to increase their construction rate by 50%. However, a master craftsmen managing junior craftsmen on a large-scale construction project (taking more than a day) reduces his personal construction rate by 25% due to friction and chaos.

...A maximum of 12,000 workers may work on any given construction site. The first 3,000 workers on a construction site work at their full construction rate. Any additional workers thereafter work at only 33% the normal construction rate, although the workers' wage rates remain the same. Thus a project built with a work force of more than 3,000 workers will end up costing more (in gp of wages paid) than the labor cost of the project. However, the project will get built faster....

Back to Basics: The basic stronghold construction rules assume a typical stronghold is constructed by around 3,000 men. Of these, 47 are master craftsmen of the various types, each with their 2 journeymen and 4 apprentices, 329 men total. These construct a total of 235gp per day. Another 2,650 unskilled laborers construct another 265gp per day. The total is thus 500gp of construction per day. The two systems are compatible, so you can switch back and forth between them as appropriate.

Alex further clarified the thinking behind his math:

First, the calculations are based on 30 days of labor per month. Why don't we assume days off, you ask? Several reasons:

1. The 6-day workweek was a Christian invention; Romans worked 9 days out of 10, and slaves and laborers worked every day.

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2. Dividing construction by 30 makes for much cleaner math for the common unskilled laborer (3gp per month / 30 = 1sp/day)
 3. Assuming daily work avoids the problem of calculating overtime. Put another way, if laborers work 25 days out of 30, but slaves work 30 days out of 30, does that mean slaves have a lower daily construction rate? Or does that mean you get more work out of slaves? Can you get more work out of laborers if you have them work 30 days per month? How long can that crunch be sustained?

So, with that in mind, the system in DAW yields the following:

Unskilled laborers produce 3gp per month, so dividing that by 30 yields a very clean 1sp per day.

Apprentice craftsmen produce 10gp per month, or 15gp per month when supervised. That yields 33cp per day, or 5sp per day when supervised ($33 \times 1.5 = 49.5$, rounded to 50cp = 5sp)

Journeyman craftsmen produce 20gp per month, or 30gp when supervised. That yields 66cp per day, or 1gp per day when supervised. ($66cp \times 1.5 = 99cp$, rounded to 1gp)

Master craftsmen produce 40gp per month, or 30gp when supervising. That yields 1gp 33cp per day, or 1gp per day when supervising. (40gp, less 25%; $40 \times 25\% = 10$; $40-10=30$)

1 Master, 2 Journeymen, and 4 Apprentices yields $1gp + 2 \times 1gp + 4 \times 5sp = 1+2+2 = 5gp$ per day.

Does that track?

"A maximum of 12,000 workers may work on any given construction site. The first 3,000 workers on a construction site work at their full construction rate. Any additional workers thereafter work at only 33% the normal construction rate, although the workers' wage rates remain the same. Thus a project built with a work force of more than 3,000 workers will end up costing more (in gp of wages paid) than the labor cost of the project. However, the project will get built faster."

Assumptions:

1st 3000 workers x 1sp per day = 300gp

2nd 3000 workers x 1sp per day x 33% = 100gp

Total construction rate = 400gp / day

Construction price is 120,000gp

Construction Time:

With 3,000 workers: $120,000\text{gp} / 300\text{gp per day} = 400 \text{ days}$

With 6,000 workers: $120,000\text{gp} / 400\text{gp per day} = 300 \text{ days}$

Construction time reduced by 25% ($400 \times .25 = 100$; $400 - 100 = 300$)

Construction cost:

With 3,000 workers: $300\text{gp per day} \times 400 \text{ days} = 120,000\text{gp}$

With 6,000 workers: $600\text{gp per day} \times 300 \text{ days} = 180,000\text{gp}$

Construction cost increased by 50% ($120,000 \times .5 = 60,000$; $120,000 + 60,000 = 180,000$)

Vassal Duties

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/vassal-duties>

July 28, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Thomas Weigel wrote:

Continuing my slog through the domain rules ...

A lot of the vassal duties are self-explanatory. And almost all of them, I can see a PC lord requesting of a vassal at various points, and a PC vassal feeling that they were useful and good.

I don't understand the Call to Council at all, however. Is there any benefit that the lord or vassal receives from this? Otherwise ... it seems punitive rather than useful.

(I mention the vassal's benefit because most of the duties will at least theoretically benefit the vassal as well.)

The easiest way I can explain "Call to Council" is to reference King Robert summoning Ned Stark to serve on his Small Council at the start of Game of Thrones.

In game terms, here are some reasons why a PC might use Call to Council:

- The NPC Vassal has knowledge, proficiencies, spells, or magic items that the PC ruler wants to gain access to. For example, if the Vassal has Loremastery, or the ability to cast Communion.
- The PC wishes to go adventuring and wants to have his most trusted Vassal running the realm while he is off adventuring. Substitute "carousing" for "adventuring" and you have the Game of Thrones situation.
- The PC thinks the Vassal may be turning treacherous, and he wants to "keep his enemies close" by having him in the capital, near the PC. This was a tactic that Louis XIV used extensively.

The benefit to the Vassal is that he is getting close access to his Lord, which is generally a good thing. He'll have the opportunity to present children as pages, show his worth, and so on.

Realms and Domains

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/realms-and-domains>

August 01, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Beragon wrote:

I've a question regarding Building a Realm: I've tried to find the answer in the rulebook but can't find it:

An adventurer can control more than one domain... do the domains have to be "touching" each other (i.e. contiguous) or can there be unconquered land between them?

The domains within a realm does not have to be contiguous, no. It's definitely helpful, but not strictly necessary.

A case where non-contiguous domains is quite common is in a feudal society. The king controls the overall realm. Each of, say, four dukes controls a sub-realm (a duchy). However, if the king is smart, he will arrange things such that each 'duchy' is made up of non-contiguous domains spread across the kingdom. That way none of the dukes becomes a regional powerhouse.

James S then wrote:

Is that how it works in your campaign Alex? How have you managed it, 'administratively'? Easy? Hard? Somewhere in between?

There have been plenty of non-contiguous realms in our campaigns, yes. When the different domains are within a larger realm that is at peace, it's a non-issue.

It can lead to interesting strategic situations when the realm above goes into chaos, or an enemy attack prevents movement between the domains, and so on.

Beragon then wrote:

Thanks guys. Not requiring having contiguous hexes makes realm-building intriguing.

I'm trying to incorporate ACKS to the Greyhawk campaign setting. I'd like to use the maps of the Flanaess as is (I'm debating whether to change the 1 hex = 30 miles to 1 hex = 24 miles as in ACKS or just convert ACKS rules to a 1 hex = 30 miles formula - i.e. the maximum domain size is a 30-mile hex, not 24 - any input on this would be much appreciated as well).

I'm using the Living Greyhawk Gazetteer as a reference... I'm not necessarily trying to apply it word-for-word however (for example, I have no qualms about leveling down most NPCs in that book to ACKS's level range, and plan on using ACKS population assumptions, with the book's population totals merely being a "guideline" in my decision-making)

Last night, for a warm-up, I attempted to apply the ACKS domain rules to the County of Urnst, which prompted me to ask the question in the OP. The "rulership" of the County is listed as follows:

*1 Countess
6 Archbaronies
9 Lord baronies
11 Field baronies*

Taking that info, I assumed that the Countess is the overall ruler of the realm; the archbarons are her henchmen; they in turn, control vassal realms - their henchmen are the lord barons; they in turn have sub-vassal realms and their henchmen are the field barons.

When assigning all 27 members of the rulership a hex, there were still quite a few hexes left over on the map for the realm of the County of Urnst. I would like to assume that, for the un-claimed hexes, the Countess claims such lands in name only. Furthermore, several cities, villages, and towns are noted on the map. Placing domains around these locations necessitates having to "spread out" the domains such that they need to be interconnected through contiguous lines (which looks weird), or there needs to be unclaimed territory between them.

*I'm pretty sure most, if not all of the nations in the setting will have similar results of several unclaimed hexes, and that many nations claim regions of land "in name only".
Does that all sound about right? I think I'm using the ACKS rules as intended.*

Beragon, that sounds right.

The unclaimed hexes in between the domains will be where monsters live, and create ideal opportunities for adventuring.

Securing Domains

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/securing-domains>

July 30, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

How do you know when you've secured a domain? That is, first of all, how do you know when you're "done"? If 1 square mile is a domain, why not stop there? You can grow more later, right? Plus, if you get a bad domain resources roll, another roll is just a mile away. What's the benefit of carving out a "3-hex" domain, for example?

And then, how do you know when it's "secured"? No lairs? No wandering monsters for a day? Something else?

Thanks!

"How do you know when you are done"? A domain is secured when any / all monster lairs within the area have been defeated.

"Why not stop at 1 square mile?" The initial benefit of securing a larger domain is noted under "Attracting Peasants and Followers", in the Domain Population table. Starting families are based on the number of 6-mile hexes secured. A 6-mile hex is 32 square miles. If you secure only a single 1 square mile domain, you'd only get 1/32nd of the total.

"If you get a bad resource roll, another roll is just a mile away!" As a Judge, I would not permit this.

"You can grow more later!" Yes, but you only get your Starting Families once.

jedavis then wrote:

I am a bit curious about this - how does one determine how many monster lairs are in a given hex? Roll a handful of wilderness encounters and see which ones give you a lair? We have a chaotic character looking to start a beastman realm, and this is becoming an increasingly relevant concern.

Based on the average frequency of encounters, the average spotting distances of encounters, the average percentage chance of an encounter being in a lair, and the average distance traversed per encounter throw, I worked up the expected number of lairs per hex.

You can use the following table to determine how many lairs will appear in each hex:

Terrain	Lairs Per Hex
Inhabited	1d4
Clear, Grass, Scrub	1d4
Hills	2d4+1
Woods	2d4+1
Desert	2d4+1
Jungle	2d6+1
Mountains	2d6+1
Swamp	2d6+1

Each day of searching, allow one encounter throw to find a lair.

Buying Formulas

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/buying-formulas>

August 28, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

MichaelPfaff wrote:

How much do formulas typically cost on the market? A sample has identical function and costs 2x the base price of the item. Should a formula be the same price?

Thanks!

Mike

I would recommend charging 1/2 the base price of the item, e.g. the cost savings of one item. An actual item would be 2x base price; a formula is much less useful than an actual item.

PCs as Henchmen of a High Level NPC?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/pcs-henchmen-high-level-npc>

September 11, 2012

Tag: Q&A

cr0m wrote:

Hey Autarchs,

Could PCs be enlisted by a high-level NPC as vassals to manage a domain? I've been thinking that the pressure of keeping a borderlands or newly settled wilderness domain secure, the 20% rent owed, and other demands (political and otherwise) could make a really interesting campaign.

Is this possible under the rules for domains? How would this even work?

If the vassal is going to be an adventuring henchman, then the PC would have to finance (or conquer) the henchman vassal's stronghold for him, yes.

The Domains at War rules do provide for events in which an establish ruler with a stronghold may seek to become a vassal of a PC, though. Such a thing is not unheard of!

Likewise, a low-level PC could readily end up in possession of a stronghold if he chooses to become the vassal of a higher level NPC. For example, Baron Granicus and his family are wiped out by orc raiders who occupy his manor. The PC adventurers clear out the manor house and avenge the Baron. The barony must be led, however. The local Count decides that no one is better suited to lead it than the heroes who avenged the Baron, and offers them his manor home and barony (a few dozen families). Keep in mind that most NPC barons are quite low level.

Thief PCs Performing Hijinks for NPCs

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/thief-pcs-performing-hijinks-npcs>

October 01, 2012

Tag: Q&A

MichaelPfaff wrote:

I have a couple questions pertaining to hijinks and XP for PCs:

Let's say a PC does a hijink for an NPC boss, like Stealing or something.

- 1. Does the PC count as a syndicate member for XP purposes (i.e. 50% of value)?*
- 2. Does a syndicate member get XP if they are not technically a member of the syndicate? Let's say it's just a PC doing some "freelance" work?*
- 3. What happens if the syndicate member gets 0% cut of the goods? Like, they owe the boss a favor or are just being forced to steal for no cut. Do they still get 50% XP of the value?*
- 4. If PCs can undertake hijinks for NPCs and get XP, does the 50% gp need to meet or exceed the GP threshold (this is unclear for syndicate members)?*
- 5. Is there any other advice or things to take into consideration for PC syndicate members of an NPC Thief Guild?*

1. A PC who performs a hijink earns XP equal to the gp value of the hijink. (An NPC earns 50% because he's an NPC).

2. Yes. Membership in a syndicate is not a prerequisite to getting XP for a hijink.

3. The PC still gets XP equal to the gp value of the hijink. This would be analogous to a PC who gets XP from treasure from an adventure, even if he personally takes no share of the actual treasure.

4. No. Hijinks are adventure-like, and hijink perpetrators do not have to meet GP thresholds before getting XP. A syndicate leader getting income from other's hijinks does have to meet GP thresholds, however.

5. Fundamentally, hijinks are meant to abstract an NPC's activities over a period of several weeks. The hijink roll subsumes the weeks of scoping, planning, plotting, and so on that are involved. A PC should never be able to drop into town for a day, run a hijink, and depart. Be careful not to allow hijinks to be used as a substitute for adventuring by PCs. The best way to incorporate PC hijinks is to use them when the other PCs are also engaging in long down-time activities (training soldiers, spell research, etc.).

Potions and Scrolls...Do They Need Monster Parts?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/potions-and-scrollsdo-they-need-monster-parts>

September 15, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

Pretty much what I said above, do they need monster parts for things like scrolls and potions?

I'm trying to wrap my head around a thematically appropriate dead monster for a cure light wound scroll/potion.

From ACKS, Chapter 7, Creating Magical Items:

Creating magic items requires **special components** for each spell effect in the item. Components are **usually** organs or blood from one or more monsters with a total XP value equal to the gp cost of the research. The cost of any special components is in addition to the base cost of the research. If a character does not have a formula when he begins creating the item, he will not learn the special components until the work is 50% complete. **The Judge will determine the specific components required for each item.** Different formulas for the same item may require different components.

To be clear, what is required to make magic items is "special components". Special components are usually, but not always, monster parts; as Judge, it's up to you to determine what the components are. The choice can help you control how many magic items get created, and what type.

In my Auran Empire campaign, potions of 3rd level or less use rare herbs, and scrolls of 3rd level or less use crushed gems. These components are generally available for sale at the Tower of Knowledge to guild members. Conversely, the most powerful ritual magic (e.g. Wish spells) require very rare Fragments of the Tablet of Destiny, which cannot be bought at almost any price. In between, most other items require monster parts.

NPCs, Gold, and Disposable Income

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/npcs-gold-and-disposable-income>

October 02, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Rodriguez wrote:

My campaign is running for some time now and more and more often I wonder how much Gold an NPC has available. Things like:

-How much gold has the local alchemist saved up to buy funky dwarven contraptions?

-A poor (but pretty high level) mage had to spend all his treasure to rebuild his spellbook. How can he earn money to build up his power to former levels?

-How expensive can the current pet project of the local dwarven machinist be?

I guess with magic users or priests I could use the "Spell Availability by Market" table to sell his Spells but that seems to be a pretty high income.

Jard then wrote:

could we not assume that a mage (or any high level NPC) could be making an average monthly pay equal to their GP threshold?

Jard beat me to it. In point of fact, the GP thresholds are the average monthly wages of NPCs of given levels. That's why they are the GP thresholds.

Cost of Walls Thinner or Thicker than 10 Feet?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/cost-walls-thinner-or-thicker-10-feet>

October 17, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

Tavis wrote:

I'm working on the ACKS conversion of Dwimmermount's fortress of Muntsburg, where the outer walls are 5' thick. How does making a wall thicker or thinner change the stronghold construction costs on p. 126?

If the outer walls are only 5' thick, the cost per 100' length is halved.

Recharging Rods, Staves and Wands

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/recharging-rods-staves-and-wands>

December 05, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

Duncan Hines wrote:

A quick question for you all... I can find no hard and fast rule(s) in ACKS for recharging magic items. Under the description for Rods of Cancellation it specifically states that this item has one use and cannot be recharged, so I'm assuming other charged items can be recharged if a spellcaster has the appropriate spells to do so.

So are there any official rules? Do all you other DMs house rule this?

Thanks.

ACKS does not account for recharging of items. If you allow recharging to be cheaper than initial charging, it can cause distortions in the world/economy. (Imagine a kingdom with several dozen old Wands of Fireball which it cheaply charges up whenever a war breaks out. Suddenly fireball dominates the battlefield).

My recommendation would be to treat recharging as creation of a charged magical item with a sample at hand.

Tax-Free Zones in Domains?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/tax-free-zones-domains>

December 09, 2012

Tag: Q&A

shane wrote:

Ok, so what happens when my PCs establish a constitutional right of the peasantry to be free from taxes on their produce? I.e., anything they grow or raise is theirs to keep.

Is this covered under "land income" or "tax income"?

How do lower taxes effect a domain? Does abolishing taxes (wholly or partially) put more money "into the market", so to speak, possible improving the local market class?

My players just engineered a coup in a city state to unseat a tyrant and establish a constitutional monarchy (consisting of a former bandit king---now real king---and his troops, a unicameral legislature consisting entirely of the landed aristocracy/previous merchant oligarchy, and a semi-independent/autonomous farmer's/peasants council), and the peasants' demands have included partial freedom from taxation on certain goods.

The urban domain should still function as written, and I can simulate lower tax income easily enough for the domain holder, but I'm wondering what greater noticeable effects I might be able to include once these new laws come into effect.

Should this simply be modeled by a tax rate of 0gp/family/month, or should it have an effect on land value income or service income as well?

Jard then wrote:

According to the rules, standard taxes are 2gp/family/month and lowering that is worth +1 to morale checks per 1gp below normal. Therefore the bonus would likely be a constant +2. This would also model the peasants flocking to the region because it would likely result in an uptick in the ongoing morale level, and levels above 0 result in extra immigration.

Jard has provided the official answer as well as I could! Thanks for the speedy response. If you want something more radical, you can certainly play with the Land Values, Tax Rates, and so on if desired. All sorts of possibilities exist to tweak the framework.

Making Arrows +X

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/making-arrows-x>

December 23, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

What is the cost for making magical arrows? Is it really 5000gp for 20 +1 arrows? The chart mentions that the base cost for an arrow is 10gp but only in reference to the crafting time. Is the cost meant to be that high?

A bundle of arrows costs 5,000gp to enchant, or 2,500gp with a sample or formula. A wise (or rules-lawyering) mage might make 1 arrow first at a cost of 250gp and then use that as a sample.

The reference to "base cost" is for the time to craft the magical arrows. Time to craft any magical weapon is based on the base cost of the weapon, and is 1 month per 10gp. For instance, swords normally cost 10gp so it takes 1 month to craft a +1 sword.

Thus the rules are stating that it takes 1 month to craft 20 magic arrows, or more or less 1 arrow per working day.

Malo Monkey then wrote:

I think it begs the question of how you deal with recovering ammunition that has been shot in combat. A magic sword isn't normally going to be lost by using it in a melee, so the cost of creating it seems acceptable. Magical ammunition on the other hand may be lost once it's used. If that's the case, then the cost seems very high indeed.

How do you house rule recovering ammunition? Do magical arrows have an increased chance of surviving the process?

And Grubsnatcher then wrote:

Arrows are now great treasures. My players were very happy to find the six magical arrows in the Caves of Chaos, elevating them to level 2 almost immediately. The ACKS ammo rules does boost the gold/xp value of found magical arrows through the roof.

Grubsnatcher - how did 6 magical arrows raise them to level 2? At most they could have gotten 1,500gp from the arrows if they found a buyer (unlikely if trying to sell at the Class VI market Keep).

Malo - I generally rule that when an arrow is shot, its expended if the shot hits, and recoverable if the shot misses. This ensures that arrows don't get "wasted".

General Value - A scroll of magic missile has a 500gp base cost while one +1 arrow has a 250gp base cost. In both cases you're dealing 1d6+1 magical damage. The scroll requires the user be stationary and declare before the initiative roll, the magic arrow requires a to hit roll. This seems appropriate to me but obviously it's changeable if it doesn't make sense for your setting.

Magic Item Cost Details

<http://www.autarch.co/forum/magic-item-cost-details-0>

September 05, 2011

Tag: Q&A

Duskreign wrote:

Duskreign's Minion here.

As the recovery and sale of magic items (or creation thereof) is a critical part of the economy of ACKS, I would suggest that all listed magic items have their cost listed. This could be in the item description or in a table (existing or otherwise). There are two main reasons

1) it becomes easy for the DM to gauge how much money is flowing the the PCs and allows them to adjust, if necessary.

2) as the properties of many items are not directly replicated by spells, there will be much discussion over the spell level required to make many of the listed items. Example bracers of armor 7. Is this a 7th level spell? There are several examples of commonly coveted items that do not easily fit the formula. A different option would be to list the spell(s) required to make an item. This would serve to provide an easy means of calculating cost and knowing what spell the creator needs to create the item.

A few thoughts in response:

1) You don't necessarily need to know a spell to create an item. A formula or sample will suffice. The majority of magic items, I assume, are made from formulas or samples. The requirement to know the spells is to limit mages creating never-before-seen items with bizarre powers, or very rare items.

2) Many of the magic items in the game aren't made using any of the common spells listed in the Magic chapter. The implication is that no living Mage knows the spells used to create the items, and they are instead working from samples and formula only.

3) For the above reasons I am loathe to provide a spell for each magic item in the game.

Providing a base cost is on my to do list. —> <http://www.autarch.co/comment/10345#comment-10345>

The Player's Companion added the spells for virtually every magic item in the core rules. I've created a spreadsheet which has the cost and time to create pretty much everything. I do plan to get it cleaned up and on the site.

I should add that in my own campaign setting (Auran Empire) I use the rarity of the components involved as a means of controlling the rate of production. Most ritual magic requires as its special component some "Fragments of the Tablet of Destiny", which is an ancient long-sundered artifact which had set the laws of reality; its breakage allowed magic into the world.

This keeps items like Rings of Wishes and Potions of Longevity in check quite rare. (Those items are really just "ritual magic containers" that store up a ritual for later use).

Potions vs. Scrolls

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/potions-vs-scrolls>

January 13, 2013

Tag: Q&A

MichaelPfaff wrote:

Couple questions:

- 1. Why is the cost the same since potions are more versatile (can be used by anyone) and scrolls can generally be used by caster types that require the spell to be on their spell list? Should scrolls be slightly cheaper to create?*
- 2. Should certain spells be unavailable as potions? I'm thinking specifically Restore Life & Limb here, but others might fall into that category. I'll probably make RL&L a non-potionable spell in my campaign, but I'm interested in hearing others' thoughts on it. It just sounds kind of ridiculous having a potion dumped down someone's through to revive them instead of a Cleric casting it from a scroll. But, we've had people use potions on "mortally wounded" PCs to get them up to 1HP, so ...*

Potions:

1. The effect of the potion is always triggered on the drinker (or, if an oil, on whatever the oil is rubbed on).
2. A potion cannot be an instantaneous effect.
3. A potion always has a duration of 1d6+6 turns.
4. A potion cannot be used to record a new spell.

Scrolls:

1. The spell has its usual effect and duration.
2. Any type of spell can be put on a scroll.
3. A scroll can be used to record a spell for later conveyance.
4. Many spells can be recorded on one scroll, so encumbrance is much less.

As far as a potion of restore life and limb, I'd say no, but I'd probably permit an Oil of Restoration. The idea of a holy ointment that can be rubbed on the body to restore life or reconnect a severed arm makes sense to me.

Thomas Weigel then wrote:

Aw, you beat me to it (with a slightly different list, it looks like).

I would note that there are several potions in canon that have instantaneous effects, however: the healing group, longevity, and sweet water.

Good point.

Let's clarify, then, that a potion can't have an instantaneous effect on something other than the imbiber. I.e. you couldn't drink "a potion of fireball" to get the ability to unleash 1 fireball.

MichaelPfaff then wrote:

But, you could say, research a new potion called "Potion of Firebreathing" that uses the Fireball spell and allows the imbiber to breath flames within the next round or something?

You'd need to create a spell called "firebreathing" that allows the spellcaster to breathe fire. Then you could create such a potion.

Domain By Council

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/domain-council>

January 21, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Tywyll wrote:

A fighter, mage, cleric, and thief hit 9th level and decide to pool resources to build a domain. Does that work? If so, how? Do they all earn xp from the taxes? Do they all generate followers? Do they benefit from the cleric's half off ability? Or is only one of them considered to be the domain master and they receive the benefits alone?

I do not think it likely that a set of rules could accommodate all of the possible ways in which PCs might configure their domains, so it's probably best to do as Cameron et. al have done and simply adjudicate ad hoc based on what the PCs decide, knowing that the core economics can support it.

Reading this thread reminded me of the useful truth that RPG rules are fractal. If you add detail in an area (as we did with domain rules for ACKS), rather than be sufficient, it actually results in further detail being added to extrapolate from the elaborations you've provided.

Thieves and Magic

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/thieves-and-magic>

January 26, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

Rodriguez wrote:

The thief in my group now has access to the invisibility and inaudibility spells via the mage of another player.

I still wonder what benefit this would give the thief if it comes to picking pockets and the stealing (or other) hijinks.

I guess it could give him at least a steady income per day similar to the price of the two spells (2×20gp) but what about Hijinks?

I'd probably extend him the benefit of the spell's die roll modifier on his hijinks.

Hijinks for Syndicate Members

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/hijinks-syndicate-members>

February 08, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

MichaelPfaff wrote:

"Syndicate members earn XP equal to 50% of the gp value of hijinks they perpetrate successfully. On average, 1st level followers will earn 50XP per month from hijinks. Assuming that their leader manages to bail them out of trouble every time they get caught, followers will reach 2nd level in about 25 months (two years). Most ruffians do not, in practice, live that long."

My question is: do syndicate members need to exceed their level's GP Threshold in the same way the guild leader does?

No, they do not have to exceed their monthly GP Threshold. Doing hijinks is quite high-risk and sufficiently adventurous that it bypasses the GP Threshold requirements.

House of the Rising Sun (of gambling, investments, and slave labor costs...)

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/house-rising-sun-gambling-investments-and-slave-labor-costs>

February 07, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Rodriguez wrote:

A thief in my group wants to open a gambling den so now I have to figure out how to handle this...

*I guess that would count as "Investing in a Business" [1] So for 1000 GP invested into his establishment he would gain 1d10-1d4 *10 GP per month and the core book would even deliver a maximum amount of feasible investment size per city size with the Hideout rules!*

What about the people working there? I think they are some kind of investment as well and as a true capitalist I count them as "Professional Slaves" per Core Rules for the investment amount: The standard worker in such a house would probably be a Carouser who expects 6 GP in wages per month, putting his worth at $6 \times 33 \approx 200$ GP (because I am very generous GM). This kind of calculating makes it very easy to add other "services" there as well, using the secret ratio [2] to determine the wage or cost.

*Example: If he builds a House worth 2000 GP and hires 5 shady gamblers he will gain 1D10-1D4 * 30 GP (an average of 90 GP per month) and has to pay 30 GP wages*

*What about Henchmen with the Gambling proficiency? I would calculate their "worth" according to the same level as a true profession (25*33GP for an apprentice, 50*33GP for a Licensed practitioner and 100*33 GP for a Master) instead of the 1D6 GP per proficiency per month because they play for the "House".*

So far so good.... Did I miss something? Some questions remain:

Would that income generate XP when it gets over the threshold?

The above should also work for other, more legit, kind businesses so I feel there is still something missing, something that makes it different from a pure business deal. Something with more risk and a chance for a better payout... Like Hijinks but I am not sure how I could fit them in.

Any ideas?

Would that income generate XP when it gets over the threshold?

APM: Id' say yes.

The above should also work for other, more legit, kind businesses so I feel there is still something missing, something that makes it different from a pure business deal. Something with more risk and a chance for a better payout... Like Hijinks but I am not sure how I could fit them in.

APM: As a general rule, illegal businesses are riskier; and higher risk tends to correlate with higher return. So consider having the rate of return be $(1d12-1d4)\%$, which would yield an average $(6.5-2.5) 4\%$ rate of return instead of 3% rate of return. Then, in any month when the 1d12 turns up a natural 1, or that the rate of return is negative, the House gets raided by the authorities! Some random number of the staff are charged with drunkenness, outrage, and/or gambling (create a little chart to work this out randomly). These charges will likely just yield fines, of course, but it'll be fun.

Why Are Festivals So Expensive?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/why-are-festivals-so-expensive-0>

February 18, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Thomas Weigel wrote:

Playing with Domain Morale, and . . . I think a rational player (read: selfish optimizer) will never pay for a festival. I can't see any upside to spending that much for so little.

If you can find enough mercenaries, increasing garrison is more cost-efficient for Morale, and you have troops at the end! If you can't find them, lowering taxes and skipping the festival nets you more money and the same Morale, which seems wrong.

I realize that many players will pay for a festival because they want to pay for a festival. But it seems to punish them.

Thomas, I love the questions you ask. They tend to be deeply philosophical ones disguised in game mechanics. There's two interpretations you could take to the rules:

1. ACKS really is telling you that a wise ruler should run his realm as a minimalist state that concentrates on defense and doesn't engage in expensive wealth transfers like festivals. Imagine stoic, pragmatic peasants who respect their wise ruler, and sneer at foolish neighbors who profligately waste the realm's wealth on parties.

OR

2. When ACKS talks about "normal taxes" and "normal garrison", it means "normal for the realm". If a selfish optimizer lowers taxes and raises the garrison while putting a stop to festivals, then after a period of time the peasants begin to see their current (excessive) garrison and current (low) taxes as normal, and slowly begin to remove the morale benefit from this. After the peasants take for granted low taxes and a well-policed realm, they start to clamor for festivals like all the neighboring realms get. This of course makes it too expensive to run the realm, so the ruler has to raise taxes and cut defenses in favor of "bread and circuses"... This causes a drop in morale, as the peasants take to the streets in outrage. An "Occupy Aura" movement spreads throughout the realm demanding monthly rather than seasonal festivals.

The idealistic libertarian answer is #1 but it seems like it only works if the peasants are Swiss. Otherwise, the historically plausible answer is #2. Psychologically speaking, festivals provide a morale boost because of their sporadic and unreliable nature - they are a variable reward - whereas consistently low taxes and good policing will soon be taken for granted. I'd probably go with #2 in my own campaign if PCs went that route.

Maticore then wrote:

Alternate take on Alex's #1:

ACKS is telling you to run your realm as an authoritarian police state, maximizing your military strength while minimizing spending on public benefits that don't reinforce the power of the ruling class.

On the other hand, that's about 1,200 years of thinking after ACKS' implied time period, isn't it?

Also: Occupy Aura. Heh.

Great point, Maticore... Thomas's player might be Il Duce rather than Imperator....

Here's another possible way to think about it:

1. If the player reduces taxes while maintaining festivals, there is a morale gain.
2. If the player increases garrisons while maintaining festivals, there is a morale gain.
3. If the player reduces taxes while eliminating festivals, there is no morale gain for the tax reduction. The peasants bitterly complain about the loss of festivals and demand that the rich yeomen pay more.
4. If the player increases garrisons while eliminating festivals, there is no morale gain for the garrison increase. The peasants believe their ruler is a tyrant and secretly denounce him for ending traditional festivals.

A Little Confused on Tithing

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/little-confused-tithing>

February 28, 2013

Tag: Q&A

MichaelPfaff wrote:

1. If you are a 9th Level Cleric, do you make tithes? To whom? The next highest level Cleric closest? What if you are in separate domains with separate rulers?

2. If you are a 9th Level Fighter, who do your tithes go to? What if you have a 9th Level Cleric within your domain as a vassal? What if there is a higher level Cleric within the same church but in a different domain?

3. Let's say you have a 9th Level Fighter who has a PC 9th Level Cleric who runs a vassal domain within your domain, do you tithe the PC Cleric? Does the PC Cleric then tithe someone else? Or, do both domains tithe separately?

4. Let's say you are the highest level Cleric in your church, do you stop tithing and just collect tithes?

As a payment, tithing represents the nobility's support of the church infrastructure. The church infrastructure in turn is assumed to absorb the value of the tithing. Failure to pay the tithe results in the church infrastructure going unfulfilled, leading to morale penalties.

A cleric's role as a noble/land-lord (domain ruler) is entirely separate from tithes. Historically the Catholic Church, and many other churches, had multiple revenue streams. Part of their revenue streams came from tithes and donations, but the other party came from land holdings.

So to answer your questions:

1. Yes, a cleric makes tithes. His tithes are going to the church infrastructure. They aren't going to any particular *domain*.
2. Your tithes are going to the church infrastructure.
3. No. No. Yes.
4. No. You'd still have to pay tithes to maintain the church infrastructure.

You could, if you wanted, model out exactly what the tithing is paying for -- it would be a mix of alms for the poor, sacrifices to the gods, consumables such as candles and incense, patronage of religious art work, feasts for the saints, and so on. You could work out the "net revenue" of the church from tithing as 10% of the revenue of the nobility at each tier.

MichaelPfaff then wrote:

Alex, how does tithing interact with congregant upkeep? Could part of the church infrastructure actually be this upkeep? i.e. the more congregants you have, the more candles, the more alms, the more incense, the more cookies and coffee for receptions, the more sacrifices on behalf of people, etc.

That wasn't written into the rules but now that you've suggested it, it's brilliant.

I'd definitely allow revenues from tithing in a domain to be assigned towards the congregant upkeep of the ruler's congregation (or a vassal or lord's).

Domains in Wilderness Hexes & Wandering Monsters

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/domains-wilderness-hexes-wandering-monsters>

May 14, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Malo Monkey wrote:

Do domains in Wilderness hexes come under frequent attack by Wandering Monsters?

Perhaps I'm reading the aggregation of rules incorrectly, but the suggestion is that Wandering Monsters are rolled for daily in a Wilderness hex even when a stronghold is present.

If this is the case, how do you manage it? Depending upon the terrain type, that's upwards of one encounter every other game day on average. Seems that you'd get bogged down in Wandering Monster rolls for a long time until a city or large town can be erected within 12 hexes of the domain, changing it to Borderlands where Wandering Monster rolls do not occur.

Or, is the assumption that once a Wilderness hex has been cleared of its lairs, there are no more Wandering Monster rolls made in that hex, period?

Thanks in advance for your feedback.

The answers you are looking for are actually in the rule book, but I fear I have hidden them somewhat because they are spread between two sections, and one of them is not an obvious place to look. Here are the two relevant rules.

Wandering Monsters in the Wilderness

When the characters in the wilderness, the Judge should make an encounter throw once per day if they are stationary or in settled terrain. Otherwise, the Judge should make an encounter throw each time the adventurers enter a new 6-mile hex.

Populating a Dungeon

After the dungeon is completed, the Judge will begin checking to determine whether any wandering monsters have arrived at the dungeon, using the Wandering Monster tables in the Secrets chapter. The Judge will make an encounter throw daily if the dungeon is in a wilderness domain, weekly if in a borderlands domain, and monthly if in a civilized domain. Any wandering monsters that arrive have a percentage chance of establishing a lair in the dungeon equal to their % In Lair entry.

How do these rules work together? Follow these steps.

1. Are you in a civilized, borderlands, or wilderness region?
 - a. If civilized, roll for wandering encounters once per month.
 - b. If borderlands, roll for wandering encounters once per week.
 - c. If wilderness, go to step 2.
2. Are you in settled wilderness terrain?
 - a. If yes, roll for wandering encounters once per day.
 - b. If no, go to step 3.
3. Are you stationary in wilderness terrain?
 - a. If yes, roll for wandering encounters once per day.
 - b. If no, roll for wandering encounters each time you enter a new 6-mile hex.

It wasn't intentional esotericism, I swear!

EXAMPLE #1: Marcus has a villa in the civilized regions of Tirenea. He checks for wandering encounters once per month.

EXAMPLE #2: Quintus builds a wizard's tower in the borderlands. He checks for wandering encounters once per week.

EXAMPLE #3: Balbus builds a small keep in the wilderness. Peasants settle in that 6-mile hex and 2 adjacent 6-mile hexes. While Balbus is stationary, or only moving within the settled hexes of the wilderness region, he has one encounter check per day. If Balbus were to ride outside of his domain into the surrounding wilderness, he would face 1 wandering encounter check per 6-mile hex.

How Specific Are Item Formulas and Samples?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/how-specific-are-item-formulas-and-samples>

May 25, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Nerdnumber1 wrote:

How specific are item formulas and samples for purposes of crafting? For example, if I have a +1 sword does it act as a sample to help with making a +1 axe or a +2 sword (or a +1 short sword)? What if I have a +2 sword, will it help with making a +1 sword? If I have a particularly ugly +1 sword, can I use it as a sample for my much prettier +1 sword? How about +1 armor as a sample for other sizes or types of armor or shields?

I've thought of even more questions:

1) Does a mage have to spend 1,000 gold and 2 weeks positively identifying an item before using it as a sample, or can she use it after more casual identification experiments?

2) If the mage can use casual identification experimentation, what if she's wrong?

For example: A while back, Mage Crystal's group found a sword that detected as magic. Fighter Bob decided to use the sword, finding, through long experimentation vs. a multitude of monsters to be a +1 sword. Crystal has decided to make another +1 sword from this sample. It turns out, however, that this is a +1 sword, +2 vs. mages (Bob never fought a mage)! Does Crystal's attempt get ruined, does she make a normal +1 sword for the normal +1 sword price, or does she make a full copy as she is surprised by the unexpected cost (as well as the material requirement of mage spleens or hag eyes)?

3) Is upgrading the magical bonus of a magical item count as a different process (thus requiring a different formula/sample) to creating a higher-bonus magic item from scratch?

4) Generally, how readily available are common magic item formulas? Would the local guild have a collection freely available to members for an assortment of common items, or would they be quite rare? Would guilds be interested in new new samples or formulas that they currently lack?

1) Does a mage have to spend 1,000 gold and 2 weeks positively identifying an item before using it as a sample, or can she use it after more casual identification experiments?

APM: I wouldn't say that the mage must use 1,000 gold and 2 weeks, but the mage must correctly identify the item, yes. For example, if the mage knew what the item was because (a) Its creator showed him; or (b) Contact Other Plane revealed its powers; or (c) an ancient grimoire described the legendary item's powers; that would be fine.

2) If the mage can use casual identification experimentation, what if she's wrong?

APM: I would rule that if the mage THOUGHT he had identified an item, but was in fact wrong, the mage would discover the wrongness at the 50% mark. The research would start to go wrong and the mage would realize the item wasn't what he thought it was. That would actually be quite an interesting way to learn that an item isn't what you think!

3) Is upgrading the magical bonus of a magical item count as a different process (thus requiring a different formula / sample) to creating a higher-bonus magic item from scratch?

APM: I wouldn't think so, no.

4) Generally, how readily available are common magic item formulas? Would the local guild have a collection freely available to members for an assortment of common items, or would they be quite rare? Would guilds be interested in new new samples or formulas that they currently lack?

APM: The answer will vary based on how you treat magic and mages in your campaign. I generally price formula anywhere from half the base price of an item down to the cost of a one-charge item of those powers (depending on my personal preference as to how common or rare I want an item to be)*. Then I use the magic item availability tables to determine if it can be bought or sold.

*EXAMPLE: In the Opelenean Nights campaign, thematic items like flying carpets, rings of djinning summoning, and efreeti bottles are more common than the baseline ACKS treasure types would suggest. Conversely, other items (cubes of force) are less common. In a Norse-themed campaign, magic warhammers, girdles of giant strength, and gauntlets of ogre power might be more common. Etc.

If I have a +1 sword does it act as a sample to help with making a +1 axe or a +2 sword (or a +1 short sword)?

APM: No, it doesn't help

What if I have a +2 sword, will it help with making a +1 sword?

APM: No, it doesn't help.

If I have a particularly ugly +1 sword, can I use it as a sample for my much prettier +1 sword?

APM: Yes, it can

How about +1 armor as a sample for other sizes or types of armor or shields?

APM: No, it doesn't help

To offer a general rule, an item counts as a sample if its game mechanical effects are identical. An "ugly" sword +1, and a sword +1 with a jeweled hilt fastened in the shape of an eagle, with its blade etched with dual blood grooves, are both swords +1. Plate armor +1 is not, however, leather armor +1, no matter what.

Domain Income/Expense Questions

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/domain-incomeexpense-questions>

June 10, 2013

Tag: Q&A

JonWake wrote:

So let's assume that you have a city of 3000 families. According to the Domains and settlements chapter, they bring in an income of 7.5 gp/ family. That gives a total of 22,500 gp/month income. The expenses are given as 2gp for garrison, 1.5 gp for maintenance, 30% for taxes and tithes, and 5gp/season for festivals (that works out to 1.66gp/month). Plugging in 3000 families, and I get 22,230 gp/month expense.

This works out to just 230 gp a month income. But the table on page 134 shows that the town should be making around 1500 gp a month.

What am I doing wrong? It's not just for this--none of my calculations are gibing with the book.

Jon, I don't think you are doing anything wrong. Your math seems right.

The tables assume that the ruler of a city with 3,000 families is a prince. As a prince, he has a realm which includes vassal domains, and those vassal domains themselves have towns within them that are paying in vassal revenue.

If you take a look at the table on p. 231 in the rule book, you will see that for a realm to have a city of 3,000, it is assumed to have something like 12,500 to 25,000 urban settlers in total. Without factoring those settlers in, the prince's city isn't making as much revenue.

susan_brindle then wrote:

The book states that taxes and tithes are a fraction of "Gross" income, which is traditionally defined as "gains from all sources less the cost of goods sold"

Does this mean that taxes should be applied before or after static expenses? (IE: If my peasants bring me 2000 gold, and then 1000 of it goes to festivals and guards, is my 10% tithe 200 gold (from the total) or 100 (from what I have left after the costs)

Also, just to practice my math skills: Prince Average has land worth 6 gp per family (and all families generate +4 for services and +2 for taxes), which means he's raking in 12 gold coins for every peasant family. He's also shelling out 3.6 in taxes and tithes, plus 1.6 for festivals (5.2 total now) plus 2 for guards (6.2 now). His peasants are worth 5.8 per family. If he has the largest possible stronghold (which costs 1200 per month in upkeep), and his domain is full to brimming, he'll earn 68,400 gp from his personal domain's urban settler families.

*This *still* seems odd- The town is essentially breaking even rather than generating revenue, and exists less as an opportunity for Prince Average to expand his realm than to create a more conveniently placed market.*

By "gross" I meant "revenue before expenses" rather "revenue after expenses". In other words, taxes are taken off-the-top.

You aren't wrong that domain revenues are vastly larger than urban revenues. It's by design. The game purposefully makes land worth much more than cities.

From a historical point of view, most rulers gained wealth and power by controlling vast tracts of land, which were a source of food and soldiers. Cities often were cost centers (consider the cost of the dole for Rome's citizens).

From a gameplay point of view, it incentives continued expansion and conquest of land, rather than playing "SimCity" and building up one city.

From a ruler's point of view, the main benefits of an urban settlement are:

1. Growth - A means of *some* growth when no new land is available to settle
2. Defense - Urban settlements must be conquered before a domain can be seized by an enemy
3. Manpower - Higher population density means more conscripts and militia available per unit of territory

This isn't to say that ruling a city couldn't be profitable, but the profits would often come from controlling trade. The game models that by giving you major bonus to mercantile trade within your own city. It also lets you team up with a thief character to control crime in the city and profit that way.

Magical Item Creation Questions

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/magical-item-creation-questions>

June 11, 2013

Tag: Q&A

susan_brindle wrote:

Something doesn't seem quite right with the formulas for Special Components:

"Components are usually organs or blood from one or more monsters with a total XP value equal to the gp cost of the research."

First off, the phrase "GP cost of the research" seems unclear- does this mean the full GP price of the item, or the cost of researching the necessary spell effects? Except that it's heavily implied that you always need components, even though you don't perform any research if you have a formula or sample or if you already have a spell in mind. So if I know Fireball, and I want to make a Wand of Fireball, I should price out the research-cost of Fireball, and then use that to determine how many squid livers I'll need?

Even with the third option, I still don't always arrive at the examples in the book. Hellhounds are worth 65 XP, so 20 of them would be worth 1300. Fireball would cost 3,000 to research. By the formula, it should take 47 (46? What if the XP value of the creature doesn't fit smoothly into the GP price of the research, does one round up or down?) hellhound fangs to make the wand. Efreeti, meanwhile, are worth 2950 each, so four of them would be worth 11,800! This is to say, the two example formulas to craft a Wand of Fireball apparently require ingredients with a 1000% difference.

On examining the other example components, they don't correspond to any particular pattern either.

For instance, the book suggests the blood of 1 troll (680 xp) to brew one potion of healing (500gp, which was presumably made using the spell effect of Cure light wounds, which would cost 1000 gp to research.

3 griffins, (1760 xp) meanwhile, are needed for a scroll of fly, which would cost 1500 to scribe and is based off of Fly, which would cost 3000 gp to research.

Finally, 150 stalkers, (165,000 xp!!!) are required to craft a ring of invisibility that would cost 33,000 gp, and is presumably based off of Invisibility, which would cost 2000 gp to research.

Between the two Fireball examples, plus the three other items, I'm completely baffled regarding the intent of the rules. (I'm also a little concerned about what to do regarding Monster Parts As Merchandise, since mass and XP value don't always correlate, leading to odd situations. Imagine that a merchant arrives with ten big crates, and you describe them to the players, then roll, and discover that all ten crates combined actually contain a single efreeti ichor.)

Hello everyone, sorry for the long delay in answering this. The examples are all wrong, but I wanted to understand why there were wrong before I responded.

The error was introduced in ACKS v22. (For reference, the current version of ACKS is ACKSv v40), created 9/9/2011. In that version, I updated the XP value for monsters from the old LL version to use the new, revised ACKS values. For instance, in ACKS v21, an invisible stalker was worth 215XP, while in ACKS v22, an invisible stalker was worth 1,100XP.

Unfortunately, I failed to update the examples in the Magic Research section to reflect the change in the monster's XP values. The examples are therefore all wrong!. Here are the correct examples (I hope!):

Potion of Healing - 500gp - 1 Troll (680XP)

Scroll of Fly - 1500gp - 3 Griffons (440XP each = 1320)

Fireball Wand - 30,000gp - 37 Hellhounds (790XP each = 29,230)

Invisibility Ring - 33,000gp - 30 Invisible Stalkers (1,100XP each = 33,000)

Sword +1 - 5,000gp - 36 Ogres (140XP each = 5040)

Sword +2 - 15,000gp - 107 Ogres (140XP each = 14980)

Plate Armor +1 - 5,000gp - 3 Gorgons (1600XP each = 4800)

Susan, thank you very much for spotting these errors. I hate that they slipped through, but I'll get them fixed so future gamers can avoid this confusion.

To answer your other questions:

1. The values don't need to exactly line up, as the numbers above show. I generally just round to the closest creature.

2. The number of special components required is determined by the base cost to make the item, **not** the cost to research the spell. Thus, researching Cure Light Wounds (level 1 spell) would cost 1,000gp, but making a potion of healing using Cure Light Wounds would cost 500gp.

susan_brindle then wrote:

Yes, yes, the last thing I was really unclear about has been resolved! Thank you so much for clarifying that, Alex! I think it reflects really well on ACKS that the dev team is so active on here.

Secondary Query: Somewhere in the huge pile of absolutely delightful blog posts, is there one that deals with the fluff behind requiring huge piles of guts for a magic item? LOGICALLY, it seems like a pretty solid way of preventing players from mass producing any particular magic item (and to encourage them to make , as the pile of kobold heads builds up and they're not sure what to do with them) but I was wondering how you guys meshed that with your design goals in terms of atmosphere and storytelling. That is, in every other respect, ACKS is constantly stopping and asking itself "Will these rules encourage players to act like aragorn, or conan?" I don't recall many occasions when a fantasy wizard used hundreds of monsters as a component.

Slight clarification: Greater Hellhounds are worth 790. Lesser are worth 65. It would definitely be worth distinguishing between the two.

Thanks, I'm glad to help out. It's been a humbling experience to discover how many little loopholes and errors I left in ACKS, despite multiple edits and fairly rigorous attempts at proofreading.

To answer your question, the inspiration for the "monster guts" requirements came from a few sources.

The real world inspiration is the actual practice of witch doctors and shamans of using rare creature parts in their potions and artifacts - for example, rhinoceros horn being valued by Eastern practitioners. Then there are legendary inspirations, such as the myths of unicorn horns possessing special powers. The literary inspiration was Conan and Hyboria. Sorcerers in Hyboria always seemed to be using weird and rare flora and fauna for their various rituals. Another inspiration were the common video game RPG quests and trade systems, which frequently involve collecting various animal / monster parts. Finally, there's the game-mechanical inspiration of providing an explanation of why wizards build dungeons or hire monsters to bring them rare and exotic.

In the context of my stories (Auran Empire campaign setting), the explanation is as follows:

What are Souls?

Souls are the shards of the Logos that reside in every living creature. Each carries a measure of divine power. The transmigration of souls is the process by which immortal souls transition to new bodies. The ability of the Logos to reside in matter is dependent on the matter's configuration and properties - its *form* in classical parlance. Death results when the physical form becomes so damaged or decrepit that it can no longer contain a complete soul. When this occurs, the soul transmigrates to a new form which can contain it. This process is called reincarnation or *metempsychosis*.

Reincarnation does not occur immediately. When a living creature dies, a residue of its soul will remain coagulate within the body for a time, only gradually dissipating from its corpse. How much of a residual soul remains depends in large part on how intact the body is – the more intact the body, the more residue of the soul will remain. It is this residue of the soul that makes creature parts valuable as special components. It is this residue of the soul that a spellcaster speaks with when using speak with dead. The residual soul is also why it is easier for a cleric using restore life and limb to bring back the soul of a creature whose corpse is mostly intact. One of the reasons that the Empyrean faith teaches its clergy to cremate the dead is to help free the residual soul to move on to its next incarnation.

This thread has some suggestions for other things you could use instead of special components:

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/one-thing-i-dont-acks>

Nerdnumber1 then wrote:

This shines something of a darker light on magical crafting. Does this mean that using a hero skull in a +1 sword delay the reincarnation at least until the item is destroyed, possibly centuries or more? To a lesser degree, it is a pretty shady thing to do to monsters. How is this different than the reason mindless undead are considered evil abominations that cannot be permitted to exist (be they human, demi-human, beastman, or monster)?

I assume that the logos portion locked away is either significantly less (considering only a small part of the body is needed) allowing for reincarnation without it, or the logos only acts as a catalyst or jump-starting surge being released soon after?

If the residual soul is used for crafting an item, it's consumed (or transformed, depending how you look at it). The rest of the soul reincarnates at that point, albeit at roughly 10% reduced power. The net effect is that if you use the souls of Chaotic monsters for magic items, the strength of Chaotic souls reincarnating is reduced. The gods of Law in Aura do not see this as immoral. There's a war on. These metaphysics and rules will be detailed in the Auran Empire Campaign Setting.

Divine Power of Creatures

The total amount of divine power possessed by a creature is equal to ten times its XP value. When a creature dies, about 90% of this value rapidly transmigrates; the other 10% remains as a residue within the creature's blood or organs, which can be harvested as special components for magical research. When a creature is sacrificed, 80% of its divine power passes to the entity worshipped, 10% is retained by the sacrificer for his own ends, and 10% remains residual within its blood and organs. This why $XP\ value = special\ component\ value = sacrifice\ value$.

A living creature will generate excess divine power each day equal to 6% of its XP value. For example, a mage with HD 14** (worth 3,800XP) therefore has $(3,800 \times 6\%)$ about 230 points of divine power available. Casters use some of this to fuel their spells (a 14th level mage's spells cost about 190 spell points). The rest is dissipated or bequeathed to a god through worship. (As with sacrifice, a cleric that leads a congregant in worship collects 10% while the god collects the rest). Once expended, the creature's divine power will recharge through food, drink, and sleep – the living body fuels the soul.

Nerdnumber1 then wrote:

Does this mean that creating mindless undead out of chaotic creatures and indefinitely removing them from action by ordering them to stay still forever and entombing them (or other similar means) is a lawful act which decreases the strength of the forces of chaos? Also, does sacrificing an entity to a dark (or light) god mean complete oblivion as 90% of it's soul power is reduced (100% if the cleric uses the remains for crafting)? Can a soul be restored to life after sacrifice (presumably by using donated soul energy that the god has obtained by other means)? Is there any meaningful difference between the soul and soul energy (i.e. is a soul drained or is a chunk hacked off leaving less soul afterward)? This is an interesting subject.

No, I fear not. Whatever incidental benefit is gained is lost by the greater pollution involved in creating undead. It's akin to using a dirty fission reactor that leaks radiation everywhere, while claiming it's good for the environment because it's not burning fossil fuels.

What is Undeath?

Undeath can be thought of as a blight, corruption, impurity, or taint of the Logos. It was created by the Chaotic gods in order to disrupt the natural order that the Lawful gods are relying on to achieve their version of the Awakening. Undeath blocks the natural process of reincarnation from occurring. Either or both the body (form) and soul can be tainted with undeath, and the taint can be spread from tainted creature to creature.

Undeath's impurity has spread even into the Logos immanent within the world itself. Where the taint in an area is severe, it constitutes a sinkhole of evil. (Conversely, an area free from virtually any taint whatsoever is a pinnacle of good). When an area is tainted, the corruption may leak into corpses within, causing them to animate as mindless undead skeletons and zombies. Similarly, magical animation of the dead functions by extracting tainted Logos from the environment and imbuing it into corpses.

No one knows whether a soul can be restored to life after a sacrifice. Or, if the soul is restored to life, is it really the same soul?

"The Empyreans believe that after death, the body must be burned so that the spirit can swiftly travel to the afterlife, where its valor is weighed by Türas. Noble souls pass to the Empyrean Heaven, to dwell in the light of Ammonar forever. But most souls drink of the waters of sorrow and return again to the realms of man in a new body.

"Chthonic faithful do not believe in this cycle of life, death and rebirth. They believe that upon death, the Empyrean gods consume the soul, and then use it as fuel in the creation of new life. They see reincarnation of the soul the same way we see fungus growing in a corpse – new life, yes, but not the same life. They see, not a choice between undeath and reincarnation, but undeath and oblivion. They thus seek to keep their souls and their bodies intact until the time of the Awakening, lest their singular identity be destroyed by the cycle of death."

Mercantile Ventures - Selling Goods

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/mercantile-ventures-selling-goods>

September 13, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Shieara wrote:

In our campaign we have finally started to test the waters with mercantile ventures, and we have run into a possible contradiction in the rules. In the book it states:

"Each merchant will buy and sell only one type of merchandise. Roll on the Common Merchandise table to see the merchandise each merchant is interested in buying and selling."

But there is also an example:

"EXAMPLE: Farlaghn's caravan is carrying 20 loads of dyes and pigments when it arrives in Arganos. Farlaghn wants to see if any of the 7 available merchants will buy this specific merchandise from him. Dyes and pigments are common merchandise, for which Arganos has a demand modifier of +2. For each merchant, he makes a reaction roll of 9+. Since he is trying to find buyers, he will add the demand modifier of +2 to his roll, so he will only need a natural die roll of 7 or more. He rolls 9, 3, 7, 3, 4, 8, and 2; 3 of the 7 merchants are persuaded to buy dyes and pigments. Rolling 3d4 for each merchant, Farlaghn discovers they will buy 8, 8, and 9 loads of dyes and pigments respectively, for a total of 25. Farlaghn will be able to unload all the dyes and pigments in his caravan!"

These seem to contradict each other. If each merchant buys and sells only one type of item, why is there a reaction roll for each merchant rather than rolling to see what kind of item they will buy first?

The process works as follows.

1. Adventurer arrives in town.
2. The number of merchants is generated.
3. For each merchant, the merchant's merchandise is generated. The merchant will buy or sell this merchandise without a reaction roll.
4. For each merchant, the adventurer may attempt to persuade him to buy or sell a particular type of merchandise.
 - 4a. If this roll succeeds, the merchant will transact with that type of merchandise.
 - 4b. If this roll fails, the merchant will not transact with the adventurer at all.

To help you understand the example better, I have added some additional explanatory text in brackets.

EXAMPLE: Farlaghn's caravan is carrying 20 loads of dyes and pigments when it arrives in Arganos. [There are 7 merchants in Arganos, but none of the merchants is interested in buying or selling dyes and pigments. Therefore,] Farlaghn wants to see if any of the 7 available merchants will buy this specific merchandise from him. Dyes and pigments are common merchandise, for which Arganos has a demand modifier of +2. For each merchant, he makes a reaction roll of 9+. Since he is trying to find buyers, he will add the demand modifier of +2 to his roll, so he will only need a natural die roll of 7 or more. He rolls 9, 3, 7, 3, 4, 8, and 2; 3 of the 7 merchants are persuaded to buy dyes and pigments. Rolling 3d4 for each merchant, Farlaghn discovers they will buy 8, 8, and 9 loads of dyes and pigments respectively, for a total of 25. Farlaghn will be able to unload all the dyes and pigments in his caravan!

Why Does This System Work This Way?

One of the problems that tend to arise in RPG trading systems is that the PCs will find the One Good that has the best profit margin, and exploit it to an almost unlimited extent.

The "merchandise of interest" mechanic is meant to reward PC merchants who diversify their merchandise purchases, ensuring that they will have a better chance of selling at least some goods when they get to the next market. This will tend to drive down their margins, since not every type of merchandise will be at the best spread of demand modifiers, which is desirable.

The "reaction roll to persuade to buy / sell" mechanic is intended to reward PC-merchants with a high Charisma and appropriate proficiencies (such as Diplomacy) by allowing them to have a better chance to "load" and "unload" merchandise. The higher target number for precious merchandise reflects their rarity, scarcity, and high gross margins.

The "reaction roll to persuade to buy / sell" mechanic is also a way to account for the demand modifiers in terms of how easy it is to buy and sell goods. The random rolls for which merchandise is available do not otherwise take that into account.

jedavis.e504 then wrote

This is a good clarification! I am sort of curious about step 4b, though - if I'm a rug merchant, and someone comes to me with dyes he wants me to buy, and I decline, and then he decides he wants to buy a rug, I will probably still sell him a rug. I could certainly see only permitting one attempt to buy or sell a non-interested good to a given merchant before he runs you out of his shop, though... Might run it on a case-by-case basis.

(Also, how does convincing a merchant to sell you something he doesn't have work, logically? Are merchants assumed to have multiple cargos 'in reserve' that they're planning on moving to another location? I guess that makes sense when you look at the relation between cargo available per merchant and the cargo volumes for caravans).

Step 4b: The in-world explanation was that the merchant got pissed off at the PC. Sales in the historical past were always a matter of haggling and personal negotiation, rather than fixed prices.

I don't think it would break the game to ignore the penalty, but it would likely encourage the PCs to attempt a reaction roll on every merchant to try to convince them to transact with a particular good.

Convincing to Sell Something He Does't Have: My assumption is that the merchants being dealt with are merchants in the true sense (arbitragers and dealers) rather than the actual producers of the merchandise. Therefore the merchant might have other goods he could sell you, or access to them, they are just not the goods he's trying to hock right then.

Leveling Up Vassals

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/leveling-vassals>

October 14, 2013

Tag: Q&A

EHamilton wrote:

Currently I'm thinking through the set-up required for a high-level D@W campaign, probably starting at the Conqueror level. This means that all main player characters would have strongholds and domains and high-level henchmen. Henchmen, as potential vassals, are pretty valuable in a secondary capacity as commanders for armies.

It's pretty apparent that the best by-the-book way to level up a low-level character is to install that character as a vassal. Even though the free followers/peasants don't kick in until level 9, the early experience point gains from domain management are rapid. They easily outpace the gains from crafting or dungeon delving, making it logical to level up a full stable of commanders and lieutenants by just giving them little parcels of your land to manage. Even a few hundred acres suffices to get a character to lieutenant status, and running a well-populated 6-mile hex can yield a mage commander who can toss off fireballs. Each tower that your realm places on the border of your realm effectively functions as a henchman-buffing factory line.

Is this "playing the game right"? Should the GM be creating threats to low-level vassal lords -- raiders, assassins, coup attempts -- to prevent them from leveling this easily, or make it very difficult? I have no idea if this is a good approach to play that I should encourage, or a bad approach that I should punish! I don't want to end up with a campaign that is effectively "Bastions & Bureaucrats", where everyone levels up as paper-pushing administrators.

My instinct at the moment is to allow it, and rely on incentives other than experience points (like rare magical items, or just the spirit of adventure!) for convincing players to strike off on crusades and adventures. After all, there's no way you could literally run dungeon-crawling adventures sufficient for all the heroes in a huge realm! But I'm interested in hearing other perspectives first.

EHamilton,

A few thoughts.

First, the most important rule to remember is the Campaign GP Threshold. That will determine how far and fast a henchman will level up based on his domain income.

ACKS more-or-less assumes an "efficient feudal market" where the domain ruler of each domains is of a level of experience where he is no longer gaining XP from the domain. So, for instance, if a domain's income (after expenses) is 2,000gp, its ruler will tend to be 7th level. If he were 6th level, he'd still be gaining 750xp per month, while he'd have no way to have gotten to 8th level.

It will take a reasonably well-grown domain to get a henchmen to a respectable level.

Second, if you appoint a henchman to rule a domain, at that point he no longer adventures with you. His job is to rule the domain. You now have to use the rules for Favors/Duties to Call Him to Arms or Call Him to Council if you want his active services.

Third, if you remove a henchman from a domain you've assigned him, the henchmen should make a loyalty check. This isn't made explicit in the rules but in general, people don't like having power taken from them.

Fourth, you can refer to the Vagaries of Recruitment in D@W for monthly events to spice up the domains. You could also roll for encounters once per month in civilized domains and once per week in borderlands domains. (This is implicit in the rules for Sanctums/Dungeons).

In short, there's nothing wrong with leveling up henchmen by assigning them domains. It's expected and assumed within the game. However, henchmen that are assigned a domain tend to want to actually rule it, and not be used for dungeon-crawling thereafter. And the domain itself will have its share of challenges that call for attention.

Hope that helps.

EHamilton then wrote:

Thanks! It reassures me to see what the designers were intending. All of that sounds reasonable.

The concept of a "Call to Council" makes me think of the role of the Stewards of Gondor, or of Longchamps for Richard I, effectively a mechanism to create a viceroy who could cover for an absent king who's gone off to war. I imagine that if you wanted to have both a vassal and the king off on a campaign together, that would be a "Call to War", and you'd also need a second vassal to be called to council who could act on behalf of the throne. That is, "council" here means something more like "run my household affairs" than "follow me onto the battlefield and serve as a hero".

Follow up questions:

1) Are there any explicit penalties for not having anyone at all running an estate/domain when its ruler is away?

2) If a vassal is called to council to run the realm, and the ruler is off on a military campaign, which (if any) of them would get experience points from running that realm?

1) There's no explicit penalty outside of not having the ruler present to deal with wandering monsters, vagaries, disloyal vassals, and so on. If a player truly abandoned his domain (no one running it at all), I'd probably impose a -4 penalty on domain morale rolls (if a CHA 3 ruler imposes a -3 penalty, having no ruler at all should be even worse).

2) Interesting question. While the vassal is running the realm, I'd probably give 1/2 to the vassal and 1/2 to the ruler.

Vassal Domains & Vassal Revenue

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/vassal-domains-vassal-revenue>

October 21, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

CharlesDM wrote:

Is there a chart similar to the Monthly Hijink Income chart that is used for vassal domains beneath PCs? We're getting to the point where we've about to have a bunch of PC vassal domains and there isn't super clear guidance on how to determine their domain income to calculate the 20% kickback to the PC lords.

Thanks!

As a rule of thumb it will be $(2.4\text{gp}) \times (\text{families})$ per vassal domain. You can use the chart in the book to derive the number of families that the vassal's domain is likely to have.

Curses

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/curses>

November 19, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

So does casting Curse on an item allow the creation of cursed items, like necklaces of strangulation?

If not how are they made?

If so how does the creator avoid the effects of their own cursed objects (in the case of items that curse upon touch)?

I have a player who wants to use curses... a lot.

In general, magic items in ACKS are embodiments of particular spells. If the curse on an item is within the powers of the Curse spell, using Curse would be fine. Some items have nasty effects which would not be possible for a Curse spell, though.

For example, a necklace of strangulation should probably be built using a custom Strangle spell. I would build that as a touch-range death spell.

For the creator:

- 1) He could use a spell similar to Death Ward to make himself immune to curses while he handles the item
- 2) The Judge could rule that the creator is immune to the curse of his own items
- 3) A fully-informed creator could use appropriate measures to stay safe (such as tongs to pick up an item)

Tywyll then wrote:

Well I suppose that's the problem. He's been cursing coins with the intent of spreading them around the enemy base and letting the curse spread that way. I assume this is within the power of the spell. He keeps them in a bag after creation with the intent to eventually cut a hole in it and drop them around the enemy encampment.

I always thought that cursed items came from screw ups but wondered with the inclusion of this line how it worked in ACKS.

Oh, I misunderstood your intent Tywyll. You aren't asking about creating magic items, you're asking about the use of bestow curse to place a curse on an object within the context of the spell!

Let me address that.

FIRST, as an official rule / clarification: an object cursed with Bestow Curse is **not** the same as a permanent Cursed Magic Item created by a mage with Bestow Curse. A Remove Curse spell would remove a bestowed curse on an object permanently in the same way that a Dispel Magic removes a cast spell permanently. But a Remove Curse would not permanently remove the curse on a Cursed Magic Item.

It's akin to the difference between a staff with Striking cast on it, and a Staff of Striking. Here are some parallel EXAMPLES (for clarity):

1. I cast Invisibility on Marcus. An enemy mage casts Dispel Magic on Marcus. Marcus's Invisibility ends.
2. Marcus uses a Ring of Invisibility to become invisible. An enemy mage casts Dispel Magic on Marcus. Marcus becomes visible, but the ring itself remains magical.

PARALLELS TO

1. An enemy mage cast Bestow Curse on a gauntlets such that whoever wears the gauntlets has STR 3. Marcus puts on the gauntlets and is cursed. I cast Remove Curse. The curse on the gauntlets is removed, and Marcus regains his strength.
2. An enemy mage creates Cursed Gauntlets of Weakness, spending (50gp x 500 x 4) 100,000gp and (50 x 4) 200 weeks to create them. Marcus puts on the gauntlets and is cursed. I cast Remove Curse. The curse on Marcus is removed, and he regains his strength. But the Gauntlets remain cursed.

SECOND, while there is nothing explicit in ACKS to stop a mage from creating a massive number of items with curses bestowed on them, in general the intent of the rules is that permanent magic requires either a Permanency ritual or a magic item. It is absolutely against the spirit of the rules and default setting to be mass-producing cursed items using Bestow Curse.

Therefore you should treat Bestow Curse the same way I treat Continual Light in the rules (and for the same reason): "Bestow Curse is not a permanent effect, but is instead an effect that is indefinitely sustained by the caster without need for concentration. A caster may indefinitely sustain one curse per level of experience. A truly permanent curse requires a permanency ritual or magic item."

This has the very pleasant side-effect of allowing a curse to be removed if the spellcaster who bestowed the curse is slain, which is very much how it works in myth and fiction (except for death-curses, of course).

Fighter Domain Endgame

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/fighter-domain-endgame>

December 01, 2013

Tag: **Insight**

EHamilton wrote:

There are effectively four different endgames, for each of the four foundational classes. Clerics, mages, and rogues all seem pretty well diversified, with well-defined niches. A good realm should have a solid mix of all of them, and they each excel at one aspect of the economic game.

The fighter seems to have essentially the same endgame as the cleric, but without any of the special perks (the cheaper strongholds and loyal followers). Sure, they do well as battlefield commanders (with +1 morale abilities), but that doesn't have the same roleplay-enhancing potential as the unique economic options (crafting, etc) for the other classes. "My troops get this mechanical bonus" doesn't have as much flavor as "I'm building an elite guard of two-headed titanium golems!" or "My cultists are sacrificing captured unicorns so I can cut off my left pinky finger and turn it into an unholy relic!"

I've been playing with the idea of creating a differentiated set of new perks for fighters, something that makes them feel less like a weaker version of clerics. Ideally I'd like something that plays to their identity as elite soldiers.

Since clerics get to build a church and some of the research structures, I'm thinking it might work to give fighters some alternative structures they can use to (say) research improved versions of siege engine technology, or to train basic troops into more elite troop types, or host jousting tournaments.

Another possibility would be giving them the ability to hand out "quests" to low-level NPCs with a system like the thief-endgame, functioning as sponsors for junior adventuring teams -- with the possibility of recruiting better-quality henchmen from the successful ones.

Does anyone have suggestions as to what other ideas might work? I want something that makes fighters feel unique and not overshadowed by clerics, without duplicating something that already exists. Extra credit if it feels inspired by something in classic D&D!

Fighters weren't given any special powers because they're the default. Most realms are governed by fighters. To the extent that they have special powers, those special powers would then be standard in most empires. So I would be cautious in regard to giving them too much, because whatever you give them will be widespread.

I don't think they'd have special powers with regard to giving out quests (in fact, that's supposed to be part of what mages do with sanctums and dungeons).

THAT SAID, here are some ideas that will yield more opportunities for role-play:

1) The profession of arms is the most respected among the aristocracy. When rolling for Favors & Duties, the fighter can roll twice and select the better result.

2) The Merry Men, the Knights of the Round Table, the Myrmidons... Fighters never lack for bands of retainers. Fighters track their number of vassals and henchmen separately.

3) If they construct a structure of notable size and importance (such as "The Round Table", "The Colosseum", etc.), fighters can recruit henchmen from their entire realm, rather than just from cities. Build out a table similar to "Merc Availability in Realms", but for henchmen.

4) Fighters, being expert at war, roll twice on Vagaries of Recruitment and Vagaries of War tables and get the better result. They are less susceptible to the fog and friction of war.

Of these, #3 is my favorite, though it requires the most work. I can help work up a table if it's of interest.

jedavis then wrote:

Class goodness in DaW is sort of interesting - fighters do get the +morale, and have more profs and access to Command for even more +morale, but mages and clerics have high Int and Wis respectively, so in our tests they have had higher Strategic Ability than our (admittedly built-for-dungeoncrawl) fighters. As a result all three make decent commanders, each typically having certain weaknesses. Thief and assassin look pretty lacking in DaW as unit commanders, so I expect the best use for them is in the enemy rear causing mayhem and taking out leaders.

This was very much by design. We wanted to avoid a situation where one class was "the" mass-combat class, relegating all other classes to second place when it came to the end game.

Ability at mass combat is based on INT, WIS, CHA, Leadership proficiency, Command proficiency, Military Strategy proficiency, and Class-based ML bonus.

Fighters get access to more class proficiencies, have access to Command, and get a class-based ML bonus. Even with average ability scores, a fighter can be respectable in mass combat.

Mages have the highest INT, which helps with Strategic Ability. That in turn cascades to more general proficiencies. They have the fewest class proficiencies. A low INT mage will not be good at mass combat, but if he has a high INT and "studies war in his free time" (bonus proficiencies) he can be a very good strategist. He'll never be as inspirational a leader as a fighter, though.

Clerics have the highest WIS, which helps with Strategic Ability. They don't tend to have as many bonus proficiencies from INT, but have more class proficiencies than mages. They are thus mid-way between fighters and mages.

Bards have the highest CHA, which helps with Leadership Ability, have a reasonable number of class proficiencies, and get a class-based ML bonus. They will virtually always be inspirational leaders, though they may be terrible strategists.

Gladiatorial Games

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/gladiatorial-games>

December 15, 2013

Tag: Q&A

golan2072 wrote:

The Free City of Harat in my Barbarian Conqueror King has been taken over by a slave rebellion 20 or so years ago, which was led by gladiators (particularly of the Lizardman kind). Now this city is pretty anarchic, and the gladiators' culture dominates - strength, bravado and fighting prowess are celebrated. Instead of the slave gladiators of the old regime, however, now arena fights are usually done by willing participants. This includes professional gladiators, warriors trying to prove themselves, and duelers who solve their differences by the sword while the crowd watches. Criminals may also elect to have trial by combat (typically against dinosaurs or other criminals) in lieu of other forms of punishment (if they survive, they are free to go - they have bought their freedom in blood).

There are generally three types of matches in Harat:

- 1) Show games, which inflict non-lethal damage, and are usually done until one combatant surrenders, or falls unconscious.*
- 2) Blood sports, in which lethal damage is used, but are usually won once one combatant shed significant blood (i.e. is reduced to half or less of his or her HP).*
- 3) Fights to the death, with no rules.*

Fighting is typically done at the Harat arena, or in local inns, with the audience placing bets on the combatants. The more lethal the fight is, the higher the bets. The winning gladiator gets a portion of the bet money.

What I'd like to have help with is how much money can a gladiator earn by fighting in the arena? And how much can a character earn by betting on fights?

In ancient Rome:

- Trained gladiators fought 3 to 5 times per year
- A gladiator died in only 10% of the matches; most were fought to wounding or standstill
- Earnings for a gladiator were 3x the earnings of a normal citizen; earnings for a star gladiator were 12x the earnings of a normal citizen or more
- Earnings were paid per bout; top fighters could earn enough from one bout to buy their own slaves (1500 denari/slave) and estates

Translated to ACKS:

- An average urban-dweller earns 12gp per month or 144gp per year. Therefore a normal gladiator would earn (144x3) 432gp per year. Assuming 4 bouts per year, that is 108gp per bout.
- A top gladiator might earn (144x12) 1,728gp per year. Assuming 4 bouts per year, that is 432gp per bout.
- 1 denari ~ 1 sp, so 1500 denari = 150gp. This suggests that our price range is roughly correct for per bout winnings; a top gladiator could buy 3 slaves.
- ACKS salaries for henchmen: 1st level - 300gp/year; 2nd - 600gp/year; 3rd - 1200gp/year; 4th - 2400gp/year.
- This would suggest that a typical gladiator is around a 1st or 2nd level fighter, while a champion gladiator is 4th level ("hero"). Occasional superstars would ascend to more glorious levels.

If an entry-level gladiator fights 5 bouts per year and earns 100gp per bout, plus 15xp for the win, and a 5% bonus from STR (120xp total), he'll advance to 2nd level after 16 bouts, about 3 years.

Assume he's now earning 200gp per bout, plus 15xp for each win and 5% from STR (225xp/bout) he'll need 9 more bouts to reach 3rd level. That'll take 2 more years.

He's now earning 400gp per bout, plus 30xp for each win (tougher foes) and 5% from STR (450xp/bout), he'll need 9 more bouts to reach 4th level, or 2 more years.

Assuming he started at age 18, he's now 25 years old and a hero of the arena.

As far as betting on the games... that's functionally a derivative. As we know from the housing crash, derivatives can trade in essentially infinite leverage as against the value of the underlying investment. I love ACKS but I don't love it so much that I will work out a Roman-era derivatives trading model for gladiator games.

Bracers of Armor - How Much?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/bracers-armor-how-much>

January 01, 2014

Tag: **Q&A**

Tywyll wrote:

So...how much do bracers of armor cost to make?

Making a broach with the Shield spell active all the time would be 25,000gp.

I'm guessing that bracers would be about 5000gp per point?

AC Granted	GP Cost	Time
1	5,000gp	1 month
2	15,000gp	2 months
3	35,000gp	3 months
4	65,000gp	4 months
5	105,000gp	5 months
6	155,000gp	6 months
7	215,000gp	7 months

New Magical Items

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/new-magical-items>

December 20, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Asaris wrote:

My players just found (and killed) their first dragon, and are wondering what to do with their scales. I came up with the following uses for red dragonscales:

Red Dragonscale Armor: 50,000gp, 200 days, the scales of ten old dragons

Potion of Fire Resistance: 1,000gp, 2 weeks, the scales of one young dragon

Potion of Fire Breathing: 1,500gp, 3 weeks, the scales of one juvenile dragon, or two young dragons

A potion of fire breathing allows the imbiber to breath a cone of fire 40' long and 20' wide, dealing 5d6 points of fire damage (save vs breath for half).

I'm just wondering if I've priced these correctly. The red dragonscale armor is priced like a magic item that gives you permanent fire resistance, as the spell, but it seems a little pricey? The potion of fire breathing is based on the spell described below, which came out to a third level spell. (Galswintha's fire breath spell is a bit more powerful than what these PCs need). Let me know if you have any other ideas as well!

Fire Resistance has a duration of 6 turns (1 hour). To create armor that has an ongoing Fire Resistance effect you might build it as a permanent item that can be used 1/hour (x16 cost). That will bring the cost down to a more reasonable level.

Rogue-onomics

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/rogue-onomics>

March 04, 2014

Tag: Q&A

EHamilton wrote:

So we currently have a campaign with a paladin, trickster, cleric, ranger, and nightblade, all starting at name level with domains.

The first four classes used the recommended buy-system for high-level conquerors (240,000 gp), and they all ended up with similar domains: About 4-8 hexes of controlled land, a monthly income of around 10,000 gp on revenues of twice that, and some moderate expenses. They've been growing very slowly at a few percent a month, with heavy investments of gold that will take many months to pay back. All this seems to be working fine.

The thieves' guild is rapidly expanding, and is earning more net income than everyone else combined.

Roughly speaking, he started with around 120,000 gp worth of spies, the highest level thief type. They've been making something close to the estimated average of 425 gp of net income per month using their hijinks (and paying various court fees, etc). With around 100 spies, this amounts to 42,000 gp of income, against 12,500 gp of their salary expenses, for around 30,000 gp each turn. Which means that guild income already starts out a factor of 3 larger than everyone else's.

More to the point, guild income can rapidly expand. With access to a few major markets (I have a Class I and two Class II's within a month's travel by sea), his roster can add a couple dozen spies a month and many more low-level ruffians. At this point he's making over 70,000 gp per month, while everyone else is still creeping slowly through the 10,000 - 15,000 gp range, and is expanding his syndicate to multiple cities.

He's also obviously at a loss for what to do with all this extra money. He keeps petitioning me for some kind of elite high-level exotic troops that can be quickly recruited to absorb this income. But I really don't want to move the campaign in that direction so quickly, with griffon riders and vampire platoons making everyone else's basic infantry look paltry by comparison.

What can I do to create a sink for all this exponentially rising syndicate wealth? Is there some sink already in the rules that I'm not noticing?

He's already offered to switch to playing a mage and restart his domain if I can't find another solution, but I hate giving up on the rogue classes entirely for domain-level play.

Hmmm.... Purchasing 100 spies without any other members of a guild seems to distort the demographics somewhat. 4th level characters are very rare. Someone hiring nothing but 4th level characters is going to have a very top heavy organization.

In order to have that many spies he would have to be recruiting in a large city. A large city would have a guild with a large membership including many ruffians and thugs and carousers. Presumably the bosses of those guilds would not look kindly on someone hiring away "the cream" ...

Possible solutions, should you wish to address:

1. Require that the player hire his ruffians in some semblance of the "real" demographics.

Or

2. Have the spies begin to get counter offers from rival guilds, raising their rates. This will reduce their profits. Meanwhile, the flood of spies doing high end work has lowered demand for low level thieves, who will accept a bit less. In other words, allow the economy to react to the player's un-demographic exploitation.

Or

3. Have a rival thief guilds begin assassinating his spies. If a rival guild has 1000 men, it might be worth it to run ... 200 hijinks per month against your player's spies. He will lose about ten per month.

Typed on my ipad from an airplane, so I apologize for my uncharacteristic terseness.

Formulas and Sample

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/formulas-and-samples>

April 14, 2014

Tag: Q&A

EHamilton wrote:

I'm trying to figure out the exact semantics of what these mean. I understand that if you have any magic item it functions as a sample, and also that a formula is something you can find as part of a treasure hoard. What I'm not clear about is when your own research produces a formula.

On page 118, it says that you learn the required components for an item when research is 50% complete. Does this now mean you have a formula for any future crafting? That is, if your final roll for the item fails, do you still get to use your discovered formula to discount the price and duration of a future attempt? Or did the failure prove that this was a flawed formula that can't be used in the future?

I'm also unclear on whether a sample results in a known formula at any point, freeing up the item itself for use. If you use a sample and get 50% completed, does that mean you've reverse engineered the item to discern its formula, once and for all, so your henchman can start using the item again?

My intent was that "required components" would be a lower state of knowledge than a full "formula". The "Required components" would tell a mage that e.g. he needed milk, sugar, and cocoa to make milk chocolate, while the "formula" would tell him how to turn it into a Lindt bar.

Formula is inclusive of required components, but required components is not inclusive of formula. Required components is a circle within the venn diagram of Formula.

I apologize that the sentence as written was so confusing! Your interpretation is quite reasonable. You could play it that way and price formulas as some sub-set of item value, with the assumption that mages half-research items to learn formulas.

Caravan Cost Breakdown?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/caravan-cost-breakdown>

April 24, 2014

Tag: Q&A

EHamilton wrote:

I've been trying to figure out the basis for the "515 gp" average monthly cost of a 10-wagon caravan. I can't find any way to hire the required number of personnel and stay under that limit, and I'm wondering if this is supported by rules that I'm overlooking.

A merchant caravan already exists as an encounter type, with every 10 wagons being managed by 5 merchants, and guarded by 20 1st level fighters ("guards"), a couple 3rd level fighters ("sergeants"), and a 5th level leader. This matches the numbers shown on the caravaneers column on page 145 (Core rules), suggesting that the intent is to match up player caravans with merchant encounters.

But that many fighters would be very expensive. Each 1st level fighter is 25 gp per month, each 3rd level fighter is 100, and the 5th level leader is 400. That comes out to 1100 gp per month.

I assume the "5 merchants" are intended to be replaced by the PCs. But if they were NPCs paid normally according to their profession, they'd probably earn at least 25 gp each (as apprentice merchants). So most NPC caravan operators must be paying 125 gp per 10 wagons per month to employ their merchants. That raises the total expenses to 1225 gp per month, or maybe more like 1300 if one of the merchants is a master merchant at 100 gp/month.

The cost of hiring all those guards seems like it would render NPC caravans nonprofitable. So I assume the average cost of 515 gp must be making a different set of assumptions than this.

I'm guessing that the 1st level fighters are supposed to be replaced by zero-level mercenaries. With 20 heavy infantry, a 3rd level fighter (100 gp), two 1st level fighters (25 each), that would still leave an extra 125 gp for hiring the merchants themselves. But maybe there's another way to get to the 515 gp target.

1. The mercenaries earn 6gp per month (light infantry wages) - 120gp
 2. The 2 sergeants earn 50gp per month - 100gp
 3. The leader earns 200gp per month - 200gp
 4. The merchants do not collect a paycheck--they collect profit*
 5. Food cost is 34gp
 6. Stabling cost is 60gp
 7. Total cost is 420gp for wages, 34gp for food, 60gp for stabling, 514gp overall
- *120gp/5=24gp per merchant per month

Colonizing Without a Castle

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/colonizing-without-castle>

May 27, 2014

Tag: Q&A

nDervish wrote:

In my just-converted-to-ACKS campaign, the player characters are colonizing a large, recently-discovered island. Prior to converting, they had made landfall, set up a small village, and cleared out three six-mile hexes, but not constructed any fortifications. Their total population is a little over 1,000, so call it 200 families.

Per standard ACKS domain rules, 200 families in wilderness requires a minimum of 2 hexes, which, in turn, requires a stronghold worth a minimum of 60kgp, which would take 4 months to build (or 2 months for 120kgp). But no such stronghold exists and, as one of my players put it, "So it could be a village for 10.000 and a palisade, moat and towers around it. I presume that is what you do in wilderness. Not a 'Keep' with unlimited stone and metal and so on. And barbicans."

So I'm wondering how more experienced GMs would handle this, and whether there's anything official addressing it. I don't want to just ignore it, because then there's no reason to ever build a stronghold. The most obvious answer would be to increase either the garrison cost, the chance of monster attacks, or both, but I can't find any guidance on that in the core book, which basically just seems to say no stronghold = no hexes controlled = no population.

Also, as a side question, does the full version of Domains at War (or any other extant ACKS product) have anything covering domain-level random events? (Plagues, good/poor harvests, etc.)

Hello nDervish! This situation is not directly addressed in ACKS or D@W, although the latter has a variety of mechanics under Conquering and Pillaging Domains that give some implicit suggestions.

What I would recommend is as follows:

1. The domain cannot progress past Wilderness.
2. The domain suffers a -4 penalty on morale checks. (In D@W, when a stronghold has been captured and pillaged, this imposes a -4 penalty on morale checks for the domain, which is where I'm sourcing this idea from).

Within the game world, the peasants are fearful because the lack of a stronghold gives them no acropolis or redoubt to retreat to if danger comes. Meanwhile, rebellious nobles or rivals will feel the ruler's realm is insecure for lack of a stronghold.

D@W has extensive tables for random domain events. Here are two sample events from one table.

Tribute: Tribute pours in from vassals and clients, increasing the leader's war-chest. The leader receives gold pieces equal to the lesser of one month's wages for his army or one gp per family in his overall realm.

War Profiteers: Merchants take advantage of the mobilization to raise prices. The cost of artillery ammunition, armor, mounts, supplies, and weapons is increased by 10% for 1d4 seasons. Each time this vagary is rolled, prices increase an additional 10%.

Magical Item Prices

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/magical-item-prices>

January 01, 2013

Tag: **New Material**

James S wrote:

I have a request to Alex...

When you were developing the system, did you work out the prices for the magical items in the Treasure section? If so, is it something you could share with us?

Given the support for economics ACKs gives us it's frustrating to have to work out the base cost for magical treasure based on the table on p118. It would be super useful to have a list / table of the items in the book and how much they are worth (And perhaps something to bear in mind if there's ever a 2nd Edition).

Pretty please?

Magic Item Tables

Potions	GP Cost	Time	Lvl	Notes
Animal Control	2,500	5 weeks	5	control animals spell
Clairaudience	1,500	3 weeks	3	clairaudience spell
Clairvoyance	1,500	3 weeks	3	clairvoyance spell
Climbing	500	1 weeks	1	spider climb spell
Diminution	1,500	3 weeks	3	diminution spell
Dragon Control	1,000	2 weeks	2	control dragon spell (custom build 11 points)
ESP	1,000	2 weeks	2	ESP spell
Extra-Healing	2,000	4 weeks	4	cure serious wounds spell
Fire Resistance	1,000	2 weeks	2	fire resistance spell
Flying	1,500	3 weeks	3	fly spell
Gaseous Form	1,500	3 weeks	3	gaseous form spell
Giant Control	1,000	2 weeks	2	control giants spell (custom build 11 points)
Giant Strength	2,000	4 weeks	4	giant strength spell
Growth	1,500	3 weeks	3	growth spell
Healing	500	1 weeks	1	cure light wounds spell

Potions, cont.	GP Cost	Time	Lvl	Notes
Heroism	1,500	3 weeks	3	heroism spell (arbitrarily assigned to level 3)
Human Control	1,500	3 weeks	3	control humans spell (custom build 30 points)
Invisibility	1,000	2 weeks	2	invisibility spell
Invulnerability	1,000	2 weeks	2	shimmer spell
Levitation	1,000	2 weeks	2	levitation spell
Longevity	3,000	6 weeks	6	longevity ritual
Oil of Sharpness	500	1 week	1	sharpness spell
Oil of Slipperiness	500	1 week	1	slipperiness spell
Philter of Love	1,000	2 weeks	2	love spell (custom build 16.5 points)
Plant Control	3,000	6 weeks	6	control plants spell
Poison	2,000	4 weeks	4	neutralize poison spell
Polymorph	3,000	6 weeks	6	dynamic polymorph spell (custom build 60 points)
Speed	1,500	3 weeks	3	haste spell
Super-Heroism	2,500	5 weeks	5	super heroism spell (arbitrarily assigned to level 5)
Stone to Flesh	3,000	6 weeks	6	stone to flesh spell
Treasure Finding	2,000	4 weeks	4	find treasure spell
Undead Control	2,500	5 weeks	5	control undead spell
Water Breathing	1,500	3 weeks	3	water breathing spell
Rings	GP Cost	Time	Lvl	Notes
Animal Command	100,000	400 days	4	command animals spell
Command Human	75,000	300 days	3	command person spell
Command Plant	100,000	400 days	4	command plants spell
Djinni Calling	18,000	180 days	6	summon djinni spell, once per week
Fire Resistance	50,000	200 days	2	fire resistance spell
Invisibility	33,000	160 days	2	invisibility spell, once per turn
Protection +1	25,000	100 days	1	protection spell (custom build 8 points)
Protection +2	50,000	200 days	2	protection spell (custom build 15 points)
Protection +3	75,000	300 days	3	protection spell (custom build 30 points)

Rings, cont.	GP Cost	Time	Lvl	Notes
Protection +3, 5' Radius	100,000	400 days	4	protection spell (custom build 33 points)
Regeneration	150,000	600 days	6	trollblood spell
Spell Storing	100,000	400 days	4	spell storing spell
Spell Turning	42,000	588 days	7	spell turning spell, 12 charges
Telekinesis	125,000	500 days	5	telekinesis as spell
Water Walking	75,000	300 days	3	water walking spell
Wishes	13,500	189 days	9	wish spell, 3 charges
X-Ray Vision	82,500	400 days	5	x-ray vision, once per turn
Scrolls	GP Cost	Time	Lvl	Notes
Ward against Elementals	500	1 week	1	ward v. elementals (custom build 4 points)
Ward against Lycanthropes	500	1 week	1	ward v. lycanthropes (custom build 6 points)
Ward against Magic	3,000	6 weeks	6	anti-magic shell
Ward against Undead	500	1 week	1	ward v. undead (custom build 6 points)
Rod, Staff, Wand	GP Cost	Time	Lvl	Notes
				*Assume 20 charges except where otherwise noted
Rod of Cancellation	3,500	49 days	7	cancellation spell, 1 charge
Rod of Resurrection	70,000	980 days	7	resurrection spell
Staff of Commanding [D]	75,000	300 days	7.5	animal command (4), human command (3), plant command (4), total 7.5
Staff of Healing [D]	22,500	90 days	1	cure light wounds at will, can only be cast 1/day per creature (500 gp x spell level x 45 / 90 days x spell level)
Staff of Power [A]	125,000	500 days	12.5	cone of cold (5), telekinesis (5), fireball (3), lightning bolt (3), continual light (2), 1-round striking (2)

Rod, Staff, Wand, cont.	GP Cost	Time	Lvl	Notes
Staff of Striking [D]	25,000	83 days	2	staff +1, striking (custom build 15 points)
Staff of Withering [D]	125,000	1683 days	12	staff +1, striking (custom build 15 points), decrepitude (7), withering (6)
Staff of Wizardry [A]	275,000	1100 days	27.5	conj. elemental (6), control weather (6), passwall (5), cone of paralyze (5), cone of cold (5), telekinesis (5), fireball (3), fly (3), lightning bolt (3), continual light (2), 1-round striking (2), invisibility (2), web (2)
Staff of the Serpent [D]	105,000	403 days	4	staff +1, staff to snake (custom build 39 points)
Wand of Cold	50,000	200 days	5	cone of cold spell
Wand of Detecting Enemies	10,000	40 days	1	detect evil spell
Wand of Detecting Magic	10,000	40 days	1	detect magic spell
Wand of Detecting Metals	30,000	120 days	3	detect metal (custom build 30 points)
Wand of Detecting Secret Doors	20,000	80 days	2	detect secret doors spell
Wand of Detecting Traps	20,000	80 days	2	find traps spell
Wand of Device Negation	60,000	240 days	6	negation (custom build 60 points)
Wand of Fear	40,000	160 days	4	fear spell
Wand of Fire Balls	30,000	120 days	3	fireball spell
Wand of Illusion	20,000	80 days	2	phantasmal force spell
Wand of Lightning Bolts	30,000	120 days	3	lightning bolt spell
Wand of Magic Missiles	10,000	40 days	1	magic missile spell
Wand of Paralyzation	50,000	200 days	5	cone of paralysis spell
Wand of Polymorphing	60,000	240 days	6	polymorph other (4), polymorph self (4)
Swords	GP Cost	Time	Lvl	Notes
Sword +1	5,000	1 month		
Sword +1, +2 versus lycanthropes	10,000	1.5 months		

Swords, cont.	GP Cost	Time	Lvl	Notes
Sword +1, +2 versus spell casters	10,000	1.5 months		
Sword +1, +3 versus undead	20,000	2 months		
Sword +1, +3 versus dragons	20,000	2 months		
Sword +1, +3 versus regenerating	20,000	2 months		
Sword +1, +3 versus summoned	20,000	2 months		
Sword +1, light 30' radius	30,000	130 days		
Sword +1, Flame Tongue	45,000	190 days	1	sword +1, 5,000/1 month; +2 5,000/1 month; +3 10,000/1 month; fire effect is level 1, at will, permanent (500x50, 100 days)
Sword +1, Life Drinker	41,000	174 days	9	energy drain spell, 8 charges
Sword +1, Locate Objects	20,000	70 days	3	locate objects as spell, once per day, 120'
Sword +1, Luck Blade	52,500	220 days		plus 1 on saves, 1d4+1 wishes; assume 5 wishes; +1 on saves is 1st level effect
Sword +2	15,000	2 months		
Sword +2, charm person	24,000	4 months		charm person 3/week; 3 times/week is x8 and 35 days
Sword +3	35,000	3 months		
Sword +3, Frost Brand	145,000	315 days		plus 6 versus hot environment/ fire-based attack, sheds light, fire resistance 35,000gp + 3 months for +3; plus (30,000+40,000+50,000)/2 for the specialized +6; plus 50,000 and 200 days for fire resistance
Sword +3, Vorpal	???	???		plus 3, plus vorpal effect, which is hard to quantify

Miscellaneous	GP Cost	Time	Lvl	Notes
Amulet versus Crystal				
Balls and ESP	75,000	300 days	3	nondetection spell
Apparatus of the Crab	150,000	600 days	6	"animate object" plus "water breathing"
Bag of Holding	125,000	500 days	5	enchanted container spell
Boat, Folding	125,000	500 days	5	Fabricate is level 5
Boots of Levitation	50,000	200 days	2	levitation at will
Boots of Speed	50,000	200 days	2	move 240' per turn, is almost-as-good-as-haste, so call it level 2
Boots of Traveling and Springing	25,000	100 days	1	jump spell
Bowl of Commanding				
Water Elementals	25,000	200 days	5	conjure elemental 1 / day
Bracers of Armor	5,000	1 month		plus 1 AC per point
Brazier of Commanding				
Fire Elementals	25,000	200 days	5	conjure elemental 1 / day
Brooch of Shielding	5,000	20 days	0.5	partial elemental of shield spell; absorbs average of 20 magic missiles
Broom of Flying	75,000	300 days	3	flying at 240' per turn, or 2 riders at 180' per turn
Censer of Controlling				
Air Elementals	25,000	200 days	5	conjure elemental 1 / day
Chime of Opening	80,000	320 days	2	knock spell, 2d4x10 charges (at 80 charges)
Cloak of Protection	25,000	100 days		plus 1 AC and saves per point
Crystal Ball	24,000	200 days	4	scry spell, 3 / day
Crystal Ball with Clairaudience	42,000	350 days	7	scry spell plus clairaudience
Crystal Ball with ESP	54,000	450 days	9	scry spell plus ESP
Cube of Force	108,000	432 days	6	wall of force is 5th level; 36 charges
Cube of Frost Resistance	24,000	180 days	3	protection from cold, 1 / hour, in 10' radius (so +2 levels) = level 3
Decanter of Endless Water	150,000	600 days	6	create water at high level
				control weather, part earth, move water are all level 6
Displacer Cloak	50,000	200 days	2	shimmer spell
Drums of Panic	125,000	500 days	5	panic spell

Miscellaneous, cont.	GP Cost	Time	Lvl	Notes
Dust of Appearance	1,000	2 weeks	2	specialized dispel magic effect, or reverse invisibility
Dust of Disappearance	2,000	4 weeks	4	a greater invisibility
Efreeti Bottle	40,000	280 days	8	summon efreeti for 101 days = 3 charges of spell
Elven Cloak	25,000	100 days	1	chameleon spell
Elven Boots	25,000	100 days	1	silent step spell
Eyes of Charming	25,000	100 days	1	charm person once per round
Eyes of the Eagle	75,000	300 days	3	eyes of the eagle spell
Eyes of Petrification	150,000	600 days	6	petrified or petrify others as flesh to stone
Flying Carpet	100,000	400 days	4	magic carpet spell
Gauntlets of Ogre Power	50,000	200 days	2	ogre power spell
Girdle of Giant Strength	100,000	300 days	4	giant strength spell
Helm of Alignment Changing	75,000	300 days	3	curse, level 3
Helm of Comprehending Languages	25,000	100 days	1	comprehend languages
Helm of Telepathy	75,000	300 days	3	telepathy spell
Helm of Teleportation	82,500	350 days	5	teleport, once per turn
Horn of Blasting	66,000	320 days	4	100' x 20' blast for 2d6 damage + 2d6 deafening
Medallion of ESP	37,500	150 days	1.5	ESP within 30' spell is 60'
Medallion of ESP (90')	62,500	250 days	2.5	as above, 90' spell is 60'
Mirror of Life Trapping	148,500	720 days	9	life trapping ritual permanent "imprisonment" effect, but capped at 20... so let's call it x33
Mirror of Opposition	200,000	800 days	8	opposition ritual
Necklace of Adaptation	125,000	400 days	5	
Rope of Climbing	25,000	200 days	1	magic rope spell
Scarab of Protection	24,000	96 days	4	death ward spell 12 charges
Stone of Controlling Earth Elementals	25,000	200 days	5	conjure elemental 1 / day

Miscellaneous Weapons	GP Cost	Time	Lvl	Notes
Arrows +1 (quantity 2d6)	5,000/20	1 month		for 20 arrows
Arrows +1 (quantity 3d10)	5,000/20	1 month		for 20 arrows
Arrows +2 (quantity 1d6)	15,000/20	2 months		for 20 arrows
Arrows +3 (quantity 1d4)	35,000/20	3 months		for 20 arrows
Arrow +3, Slaying Arrow	4,750	47 days		arrow +3 is \$35,000/20; killing on hit with no save is 6th level spell
Axe +1	5,000	21 days		assuming battle axe
Axe +2	10,000	42 days		
Bow +1	5,000	4 months		Assuming composite bow
Crossbow Bolts +1 (quantity 2d6)	5,000/20	1 month		
Crossbow Bolts +1 (quantity 3d10)	5,000/20	1 month		
Crossbow Bolts +2 (quantity 1d6)	15,000/20	2 months		
Crossbow Bolts +3 (quantity 1d4)	35,000/20	3 months		
Dagger +1	5,000	9 days		
Dagger +2, +3 versus beastmen	25,000	22.5 days		
Sling +1	5,000	6 days		
Spear +1	5,000	6 days		
Spear +2	15,000	12 days		
Spear +3	35,000	18 days		
War Hammer +1	5,000	15 days		
War Hammer +2	15,000	30 days		
War Hammer +2, Dwarven Thrower	118,500	465 days		5,000/1 month +1; 10,000/1 month, +2; 10,000/1 month, +3 dwarves only; deals double damage is striking (level 3), but only for dwarves deals triple damage is striking improved (level 5), but only for dwarves, only versus giants; returns to hand is level 1

Armor and Shields	GP Cost	Time	Lvl	Notes
Armor +1	5,000	6 months		
Armor +2	15,000	7 months		
Armor +3	35,000	8 months		
Shield +1	5,000	1 month		
Shield +2	15,000	2 months		
Shield +3	35,000	3 months		

golan2072 then wrote:

When calculating treasure, do the magical items enter the calculation? E.G. now I'm checking Barrowmaze to see how balanced the treasures are, so should I include the value of magic items in the calculation of treasure?

No, you shouldn't do that. If groups sell their magic items, they'll get extra gold pieces but will have less equipment/magic for later levels. It all balances out in the eventual and inevitable party wipe.

Experience for Automatons

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/experience-automatons>

June 12, 2014

Tag: **Q&A**

Boomishtendency wrote:

Does designing and building constructs or automatons qualify as magical research for the purposes of campaign experience gain? If so, does that then let a 2nd level mechanist invest 2,000 into a design to immediately jump to nearly third level within a week and 2 days?

The machinist does not gain XP from constructing automatons.

However, this thread has highlighted a strange asymmetry I hadn't previously thought of: At around 9th - 11th level mages and clerics are getting XP for activities in their strongholds (magic research) while machinists are not.

Therefore I think it would be a reasonable ruling to allow machinists to start to gain XP from automatons once they reach 9th level and establish a manufactory.

I'll probably use this rule in my own campaign.

Urban Investment

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/urban-investment>

June 17, 2014

Tag: Q&A

nDervish wrote:

*"By spending more gold pieces on roads, aqueducts, sewers, marketplaces, walls, and other infrastructure, the adventurer can increase the maximum population size of the urban settlement. **In addition to increasing the maximum population, urban investment also attracts new residents.** For every 1,000gp spent on investments in a month, the settlement will attract 1d10 new urban families." - ACKS 133*

The bold sentence bothers me.

For a domain, maximum population is determined by the number of hexes secured, which is in turn determined by stronghold value. You can also make agricultural investments to increase population growth, but they are separate. If you want to increase both maximum population and population growth, you need to make two separate investments, one in building up your stronghold and the other to get an extra 1d10 families.

For a town, maximum population is determined by the total investment in the town and, according to the bold sentence above, any urban investment will both improve maximum population (when certain breakpoints are hit) and add 1d10 families with the same investment.

This seems inconsistent to me and the high degree of internal consistency is one of the things I really like about ACKS.

So I have to ask... What's the reasoning behind this (apparent?) inconsistency?

No inconsistency!

Average profit, after expenses, from urban families is approximately 1/2 the average profit, after expenses, of peasant families. Therefore the cost of investment needs to be less in order for the return on investment to be approximately equal.

High Level Play for Mages

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/high-level-play-mages>

July 02, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Dave R wrote:

...tell me about it. Because it occurs to me I'm in a weird place in my experience with D&D. I've been playing (off and on, but mostly on) for 20 years. I've done a number of editions and different games, and a few long running campaigns. And I've never actually taken, or even seen, a magic user go from low to high levels, organically in play, and I lack much experience with domain level play at all. (3.0 was a partial exception, but without any domain game, and with deliberately accelerated advancement.)

Specifically, I'm wondering about expenses versus income for mages. On paper it looks like they have greater expenses and greater down time requirements than other classes (spell research, formulas for magic items, crossbreeding), with no greater income. But I don't know if that's correct or not, or if it matters if it is.

So how's that go? Does the mage make it up on income from spellcasting and magic item sales to npcs? Does the party subsidize the mage voluntarily? Does the mage charge the party for services? Or, does the mage just drop out and fall behind when he researches a spell or formula?

I know the Grim Fist mage was getting into spell research, and I know she had a domain, but I don't recall if she was subsidized by party funds. And I think the Wandering Gamist's mage was playing the domain game out-of-class so to speak. But how have yours gone?

Yes, mages tend to want more downtime than other player characters, and to need more cash for experiments. The average-sized domain of an average-level character cannot sustain a lot of magic research.

This is "working as intended". Magical research tends to not be an economically productive activity in a general sense. If it *were* economically fruitful, the implied society would quickly become "magitech" with a semi-magical revolution.

In a campaign setting, this explains why evil mages send out minions on adventurers; build dungeons to accumulate monster parts; conquer huge domains and exploit their treasuries; and so on. Parties of adventurers will either subsidize their mages' time and research or do without some of the benefits they might otherwise accrue.

If your vision for your campaign is more magic-heavy you can achieve this by reducing the cost and time of magic research by some factor.

Becoming Undead

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/becoming-undead>

July 06, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Rodriguez wrote:

In my group a character was slain by a wight and because this didn't change his alignment at all I decided to let him continue playing his now ex-barbarian after waking up 2 days later.

This created a couple of questions that I wonder about though:

Does he keep his stats and stat bonuses? (I guess yes)

Does keep the limits of his old class like weapon and armor selection? (Guess no as his class changes)

Does he keep his proficiencies? (Hard to say but its only climbing and ambushing so I don't mind if he does)

Can he still roll on the Mortal Wounds table when reaching 0 hit points? Does he get the Barbarians re-roll? (No idea...)

1. Yes
2. I would probably rule yes, as he is not likely to get new weapon training or armor mastery as a wight.
3. Yes
4. It's up to you whether he retains his class powers. I think Savage Resilience probably would not carry over to being undead as it seems to reflect an intense vital life-force and that would be gone.

Demi-human Conscripts and Militia

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/demihuman-conscripts-and-militia>

July 19, 2014

Tag: Q&A

koewn wrote:

I believe this has been answered obliquely in other contexts about demi-humans and "0 level" (or lack thereof), but I can't find a direct answer, so I'm asking with a Googable subject:

Demi-human rulers conscripting peasants from their domains/realms get demi-humans, obviously, and they're 1HD+ creatures.

Do they act as whatever troop type they're equipped to be on conscription, without training?

Or do they come at some base level and need training for things beyond some baseline (LtInf elves, HvInf dwarves..)

Thanks!

They still need to be trained. See Qualifying Number (Per 120 Conscripts) under Training Conscripts. If untrained they are Irregular and have base morale -2.

What the rules do not make explicit is whether or not untrained dwarves and elves are still 1HD and 1+1HD creatures, or if they are noncombatants/normals. That is because this is not clearly resolved in the core rules.

ACKS inherited some "wonky" mechanics with regards to dwarves, elves, and beastmen that I wish I had better resolved in the core rules. Humans, dwarves, elves, and all beastmen types have the equivalent of "normal human" - called "noncombatants" for dwarves and elves, called "females" for the sexually dysmorphic beastmen. It is just not clear what proportion of each race is noncombatant....

Aryxymaraki then wrote:

Hm, interesting.

Now I want to do some math and figure out differences in the definition of family for demi-human domains and how that impacts them in terms of conscripts and militia.

Off the top of my head, it seems like dwarves should be able to conscript more without penalty as they have fewer adult noncombatants than humans do, while elves would remain roughly the same.

One gap in ACKS is that I do not ever provide data for a typical manor of normal men. The entries under Men are for relatively tough bands of berserkers, bandits, and so on. Here is some data that should prove helpful.

We know from the Villages, Towns, and Cities section that the smallest village is 75 families.

Assume a Village of 75 families (375 people, with 150 adults and 225 children)

Given ACKS demographics in Chapter 10, of the 150 adults

1 in 20 are 1st level, or 8

1 in 50 are 2nd level, or 3

1 in 150 are 3rd level, or 1

1 in 375 are 4th levels, or 1

For a total 30 classed characters.

If there are 150 adults, and 30 classed characters, then there remain 120 0-level adults remaining. Of these 50% are noncombatants.

From this let's build a monster entry:

Man, Normal

% In Lair: 40%

Dungeon Enc: Gang (1d8) / Hamlet (1 band)

Wilderness Enc: Band (1d6 gangs) / Manor (1d10 bands)

Alignment: Neutral

Movement: 120' (20')

Armor Class: 0

Hit Dice: 1 - 1

Attacks: 1 (weapon)

Damage: 1d4 or weapon

Save: 0 level human

Morale: -2

Treasure Type: E (per band)

XP: 5

Normal men (and women) are the peasants and serfs that make up the majority of the population of most realms. Each gang of normal men will be led by a yeoman (1st level fighter, bard, or thief). Each band will be led by a reeve (2nd level fighter, bard, or thief). A manor of normal men will be led by its manorial lord (4th level fighter) with a bailiff (3rd level fighter) as his second-in-command. A manorial lord will be served by 3 men-at-arms (each a 1st level fighter). A manor will also have a chaplain (3rd level cleric) served by 2 acolytes (2nd level clerics) and either a local wizard (3rd level mage) or village witch (3rd level antiquarian witch). If a local wizard is present, then a cunning-woman (2nd level antiquarian witch) will be his village rival; if a village witch is present, then a hedge wizard (2nd level mage) will be hers. The manor will also have additional adult noncombatants and young equal to 100% and 375% of the number of normal men.

How does the above compare to ACKS demographics?

Assume a wilderness lair (manor) with an average of 5 bands of 3 gangs of 4 normal adults each. That yields $5 \times 3 \times 4 = 60$ normal adults.

There will be 15 1st level yeomen, one per each of the 15 gangs; 3 1st level men-at-arms; 5 2nd level reeves; 1 3rd level bailiff; 1 4th level lord; 1 3rd level chaplain; 2 2nd level acolytes; 1 3rd level witch; and 1 2nd level mage. There will be 60 adult noncombatants and 225 young. The total manor will have $(60+60+15+3+5+3+2+1+1)$ 150 adults and 225 children, yielding 375 total, or 75 families. The demographic breakdown is thus:

1 in 20 1st levels = 18 (15 yeomen, 3 men-at-arms)
1 in 50 2nd levels = 8 (5 reeves, 3 others)
1 in 150 3rd levels = 3 (1 bailiff, 1 priest, 1 hedge wizard)
1 in 375 4th levels = 1 (1 lord)

One important note is that most of the classed characters are likely to be middle aged, having gained experience very slowly in occasional military campaigns or from domain management.

The pool of 1st level and 0th level combatant-capable men is $(18+60)$ 78 men, of which 18 are 1st level, or 23%.

Settlements at War

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/settlements-war>

July 20, 2014

Tag: Q&A

nDervish wrote:

Between the core rules and D@W, I think I've got a pretty good handle on how strongholds are build, what they're made of, and how they fare when attacked. Settlements, however, are another matter.

At the abstract end of things, "Sieges Without Maps" (Campaigns 77) tells us that urban settlements have 1shp per 8gp urban investment, but I can't find any indication of what typical town fortifications might be for sieges with maps. Does some fraction of the urban investment get used automatically for fortifications or are they completely undefended by default and the the lord must purchase defenses separately? Or do the townsfolk build defenses on their own, at no cost to the lord, as a side-effect of population growth?

What if the lord of a domain chooses to forgo a traditional stronghold and instead build up a fortified settlement as their stronghold? (This seems to be the direction my players want to go. Their "stronghold" is a kilometer-diameter ring of palisade with 10 watchtowers and 3 gates, which they then built a settlement inside of.)

nDervish, urban investment is kept abstract because otherwise it can get immensely complex. The town is assumed to be building defenses on its own, as a side-effect of population growth and investment, to the tune of 1shp per 8gp urban investment.

A lord who wants to build up the fortified settlement as their stronghold can choose to count his expenditure as either urban investment or stronghold value. Each has slightly different in-game mechanics. In-world, urban investment might be understood as a donation to the merchant's guild with instructions to strengthen the city's walls, while stronghold value might be the lord building a citadel or acropolis in the city.

Mercantile Ventures

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/mercantile-ventures>

August 02, 2014

Tag: Q&A

nDervish wrote:

One of my players is considering a Venturer henchman/backup PC, so some questions have arisen:

- 1) [This post](#) provides a method for calculating the maximum profit that can be extracted from a given city (or, presumably, from any domain). If it's a Venturer (or someone with Bargaining proficiency) doing the extracting, should their 10% trade bonus be applied once, twice (once for buying and once for selling), or not at all (you're already realizing the maximum possible profits, so bargaining skill can't improve on it)? Does a Venturer's "mercantile network" ability affect this in any way?*
- 2) If a PC has a henchman running the actual trade route while the PC stays at home and cleans out dungeons, who gets XP from the mercantile profits? Only the PC (who fronted the initial investment, takes the financial risk, and ultimately manages the operation), only the henchman (who runs the operation and takes the physical risks), or do they split it? If the PC owns two ships and runs one himself while the henchman runs the other, does the PC get XP from both ships' profits or only the ship he's on?*
- 3) What travel time is assumed by the "average monthly profits" column of the Merchant Ships and Caravans table? It seems intuitively obvious that the average monthly profits would be higher if you have a two-week turnaround than if you had a two-month turnaround, assuming that there are sufficient goods to carry full loads in both cases.*
- 4) Similarly, how would average monthly profits (and costs) be affected if you had an agent and warehouse located in each market so that goods could be loaded and unloaded immediately instead of spending a month in each market looking for merchants to trade with?*
- 5) I can't help noticing that Demand Modifiers only impact the prices of bulk goods purchased for trade purposes, not the prices of individual items. (e.g., A sword costs the same in a market with Demand Modifiers of +2 on "Metals, common" and "Armor, Weapons" as it does in a market with -2.) Is there an in-world reason for this or is it just for the sake of simplicity?*

koewn then wrote:

- 1) I'd allow it, and I'm not sure what the rules imply, but I will do anything to promote the appearance of a Harcourt Fenton Mudd character concept.*

2) I'm relatively sure it's not the manager PC who gets XP - (The character does not earn XP from domains managed by vassals, or from mercantile expeditions risked by others, pg 146) The 'expedition' noun being the actual travel and such to make the trade happen.

And said henchmen only gets 50% of the regular XP from that anyway - I think the reasoning behind that is farming out the 'danger' results in leaving the other half of the XP 'on the table' as a surcharge for not risking the main PC? As far as what happens to the actual money, it's undefined. In the two-ship example, I believe it has to be the same expedition to combine the XP (and then it splits out like regular adventure XP)

There is somewhere a Deadpool-esque genre aware henchmen intensely disappointed he's not a real PC.

3) This is beyond me - if I had to guess, there is no travel time included or calculated, it's assuming this caravan/ship is constantly on the move between the markets indicated on the descriptive paragraph. It may be specifically for the PC/NPC who owns a trading company and doesn't actually care what's going where and when, but wants to realize the profits each month.

4) My first guess would be your agent in your warehouse still has to spend the time to find a merchant to get it out of the warehouse, and as such the profits would be realized in the same way. (your warehouse means it's still your stuff, essentially, you've not traded it yet)

5) There's probably some economic argument in that the bulk purchasers are willing to pay a touch more for the items because they know they'll sell it fast, and as such are willing to take a bit of a cut on their margins because the volume of sales is higher. Or it's simplicity.

That being said, if you're modeling a market that has seen trade reduced or cut off due to whatever reasons, applying the demand modifier++ for single-item sales would certainly be a fun thing to do to irritate players.

1) The bonus would apply once for buying and once for selling. The mercantile network would not have a direct impact.

2) Koewn was exactly correct.

3) The assumed distance is 500 miles for Large Sailing Ships (1 week of travel) and 250 miles for Small Sailing Ships (3 days of travel). Each then spend 3 weeks in port.

For 40-wagon and 30-wagon caravans, the assumed distance is 500 miles, travel and transaction time 77 days; for 20-wagon caravans, the assumed distance is 150 miles, travel and transaction time 38 days; and for 10-wagon caravans, the assumed distance is 80 miles, travel and transaction time 30 days.

The assumption is that 500 miles is a Class I to Class I route, 250 miles is Class I to II, 150 miles is II to II, and 80 miles is II to III.

4) Let's assume the ship would still need to spend time in port loading, unloading, repairing, and re-crewing - call it one week. Therefore Large and Small Sailing Ships would have travel times of 14 and 10 days respectively, allowing them to increase from 1 trip per month to 2 and 3 trips per month.

A 40-wagon caravan would decrease from 77 days to 63 days; not too much impact. A 20-wagon caravan would decrease from 38 to 24 days; a 50% increase in trips per month. A 10 wagon caravan would drop from 30 to 9 days, which would let it triple its trips per month. You'd have to work out the costs of warehousing, securing the warehouse (guards), merchants, agents, and so on of course.

5) The genuine reason is simply simplicity. You can hand-wave it as "they make it up in volume" or, if you love in-game economics as much as I do, feel free to adjust the prices of individual items to reflect the settlement's demand modifiers!

Garrisons for Pre-Existing/Long Term Realms

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/garrisons-pre-existinglong-term-realms>

August 04, 2014

Tag: Q&A

James C. Bennett wrote:

In [this thread](#), Alex suggested that, when building garrisons for pre-existing realms, "Just spend the gold, subject to a limit of 1 year's quota of each type of mercenary troop for the size of the realm."

*That seems like a good way to do it, so I am trying to determine how to calculate a year's quota of mercenaries. Most the realms I am dealing with are independent duchies and counties. Based on my reading of DaW:Campaigns, pages 9-11, it appears that with a time period of 1 month and a crop size of 360, a year's quota of light infantry for a duchy of 20000 families is 1080 (3 crops per year * 360 per crop). With a time period of 1 week and a crop size of 85, a year's quota of light infantry for a county of 4600 families is 255 (12 crops per year * 85 per crop). Is that the correct way to calculate this?*

Also, if there are more than 180 light infantry in a duke's garrison, or more than 42 light infantry in a count's garrison, are prices increased for light infantry throughout the realm? And am I correct to assume that a supply-and-demand increase in the price of troops does not increase their value as part of a garrison?

1) You are doing it correctly. Because of how the math breaks down, some anomalies can occur. The system is trying to abstract both demographic/market availability AND bureaucratic slowness. The latter is less relevant when you're building a domain over time. If you encounter something really odd, subdivide the realm into realms of the next smaller size and calculate the crop based on that.

2) Unless your duke or other ruler is obnoxiously staffing up on particular troop types, I wouldn't worry too, too much about this - you can just assume that some percentage were trained up as conscripts over time, etc. The limits on troop types are primarily there to guide players towards historically plausible behavior rather than to straightjacket the Judge in building his domains.

Put another way, there are many reasons why a realm, over many years, might have accumulated a particular army of a particular type. But in the course of a campaign year, it is much harder to justify why a given ruler could hire a vast amount of a particular type of mercenary without affecting their wages.

3) That's correct, it does not.

Researching New Spells While Recuperating

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/researching-new-spells-while-recuperating>

August 15, 2014

Tag: **Q&A**

SaruSama wrote:

So my mage died but he got better. He's currently recuperating for a month but he got some loot which leveled him while hes in bed rest. Would it be possible for him to research his new spell while recuperating? Or is that too strenuous a task?

Also related to that is it assumed I can pick my new spells or does my mentor pick them for me?

I have been known to allow mages to pursue magical research while they *ought* to be recuperating, but I do not count the time spent as recuperative. I imagine their apprentice saying "tut-tut, master, you'll never get over that arrow to the knee if you don't stop clambering into the library when you should be resting!"

Dwarven Vaults and Mines; also Mithral

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/dwarven-vaults-and-mines-also-mithral>

August 29, 2014

Tag: **Insight**

golan2072 wrote:

Two questions.

First, in fantasy fiction, the archetypal Dwarven stronghold is a mine, or is built around or above mines. How would this factor into an ACKS Dwarven Vault? Would the mines be included in the cost of the Vault stronghold, or be a separate part (essentially part of the 6-mile hex value?

Second, in the Auran Empire or similar settings, is Mithral a naturally-occurring alloy, or an artificial one? If it is artificial, what metals is it composed of?

There is no mithral, that being a purely Tolkienesque invention. I wanted all the fantasy metals to be rooted in ancient Hellenistic or Indo-European myth.

Magical metals in ACKS therefore include:

- meteorite iron (sky-steel)
- adamantine (ore from deep in earth)
- orichalcum (white bronze; copper, gold, and adamantine)
- hepatizon (black bronze; copper, silver, meteorite iron)

Of these meteorite iron comes from the sky, and adamantine comes deep mining. Orichalcum and hepatizon are alloys created with magic.

The ACKS draft of Dwimmermount has some of my thoughts on how to use magical metals in an ACKS campaign.

Militia as Garrison

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/militia-garrison>

July 15, 2014

Tag: Q&A

James C. Bennett wrote:

Does the militia have to be on active duty in order to function as a garrison? I would assume no, since soldiers deployed to other domains still fulfill the garrison requirement. However, I would like to make sure this is the case before I proceed.

Militia must be active to count as garrison. An inactive militia troop is not being paid. Allowing them to count as garrison troops would therefore make the garrison cost... not cost anything.

Moreover, a garrison is intended to secure the domain for the lord. Not having enough garrison reduces the domain's loyalty to the lord. Why?

Part of securing the domain for the lord is protecting his working peasants from predators. But the inactive militia ARE the working peasants. To the extent they are protecting themselves, they are active. To the extent they are not, they need protection.

But the other part of securing the domain is protecting the lord from unruly peasants. And this is the crux. Even in the absence of external threats, the domain's loyalty to the lord will go down as unpaid, inactive militia peasants who are "their own garrison" may decide they don't need a lord at all if they are having to fend for themselves.

Kiero then wrote:

I had a similar conundrum for my game; there's no permanent garrison in Massalia (an aristocratic republic and autonomous polis), but rather the men of property are expected to gear up to defend the city if need be.

That was judged to be a 1/4 charge for garrison, since only some of them would be ready to fight immediately (those manning the gates). Furthermore, they weren't paid for their service, it was a responsibility expected of a citizen of means.

Nerdnumber1 then wrote:

I'd hope they had lower taxes if they're acting as the garrison. One of the most tangible reasons for a lord demanding taxes is the expense of protecting the land (in fact, that was the original reason for the nobility's existence).

Nerdnumber1 has hit upon a great mechanical idea:

The percentage of the garrison cost that is coming from inactive unpaid militia must be matched by an equal reduction in taxes on the peasantry.

Example: A domain has 500 families. Each family pays 6 land gp, 4 service gp, and 2 tax gp, for 6,000gp per month. The lord has to pay 2 gp per family for garrison, or 1,000gp. However, the domain's garrison actually consists of 100 heavy infantry militia (if mercenaries, these would cost 12gp each, but they are unpaid). The heavy infantry militia count for 1,200gp of garrison. No money is taken, but tax income is reduced by 1,200gp. The lord collects $(6,000 - 1,200)$ 4,800gp.

*Note that the above only makes sense when you realize that the families in ACKS are not *actually* all exactly paying 6/4/2gp; some are wealthy peasants with rich landholdings, others poor cottars or villeins, etc. Since typically it is the wealthier types who serve as the arms-bearing militia (the yeoman class), they presumably would normally be paying the lion's share of the taxes.

Active Domain Maintenance

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/active-domain-maintenance>

October 04, 2014

Tag: Q&A

nDervish wrote:

My campaign is focused on establishing a colony in unexplored hostile wilderness and the players have decided that they want the actual tasks of taking, holding, and fortifying territory to be a bigger part of the game. Simply saying "We have a fort worth X,000gp and it holds everything within a certain area!" doesn't cut it. So I'm looking for ideas and suggestions on how to manage this.

Thus far, I'm working on a more detailed map of the immediate area. We've noticed that a 30kgp stronghold, according to ACKS rules, can secure a hex of just over 30 square miles and are placing the upper limit on territory at 1 square mile per 1kgp of fortifications, but there's still the question of what is involved on an ongoing basis to maintain control of that territory. The simple existence of the stronghold is clearly not adequate - your castle can be worth a million gp, but, if it's completely deserted, it's not going to secure anything once someone notices that nobody is home.

My reasoning at this point is that the stronghold should actually serve as the base of operations for a military force which actually secures and patrols the area around it, but I'm unsure at this point of what the force requirement should be. The only case of a garrison requirement in the rules is a per-family requirement, but that doesn't map directly to an amount of land controlled, given that you're not always going to be at maximum population density - a half-hex wilderness domain with 50 families and a sixteen-hex wilderness domain with 50 families both have the same requirement of a 200gp/month garrison, yet those troops would obviously be spread much more thinly (and be correspondingly less effective) in the larger domain than the smaller.

At this point, I'm kind of defaulting to basing the required garrison to secure land on the maximum population of that land (e.g., wilderness has a max population of 125 families/hex, or about 4 families/square mile, and requires a garrison of 4gp/family, so it would require 16gp/square mile to secure), but that makes more-civilized areas harder to secure (max population per square mile increases faster than required garrison per family decreases) and also removes the stronghold value from the equation entirely.

Intuitively, I would say that, to get the stronghold back into it, the stronghold value would provide a cap on the garrison that can be stationed there. In this example, 16gp garrison per 1kgp stronghold would give you the same maximum controlled territory, but then that would mean you can't support a garrison larger than what the population requires and can't get a morale bonus that way. Using the figures from D@W for the number of units that can be garrisoned in a structure isn't really acceptable, because it's too easily gameable. (Build lots of palisades. They're dirt cheap and can garrison a unit (120 infantry/60 cavalry) each.)

Aside from the garrison/patrol-based method making sense to me, my players also like the idea of heavy troop losses meaning that you have to withdraw your patrols and cede outlying territory even if the stronghold has remained completely secure. So we seem pretty set at this point on having that play some role instead of making it purely a matter of the stronghold, although I'd still be interested in hearing any other ideas for how to determine both how much territory and exactly which territory is controlled at a smaller-than-hex level.

If you want to have the garrison correlate to the size of the area defended, rather than the population (due to the interesting settlement patterns in your campaign setting), I would advise the following:

1. Rulers can maintain territory at "wilderness" level of security at a cost of 16gp in troops per square mile.
2. Rulers can maintain territory at a "borderlands" level of security at a cost of 24gp in troops per square mile.
3. Rulers can maintain territory at a "civilized" level of security at a cost of 48gp in troops per square mile.

For each 6-mile hex, the Judge should make an encounter throw daily if the territory is a wilderness domain, weekly if a borderlands domain, and monthly for a civilized domain.

Another rule from Domains at War that's relevant is that domains which are invaded suffer morale rolls if their garrison is not present. This is risky as you need to be able to deploy your garrison for campaigning. By having lots of small domains with distributed garrisons, you can minimize the risk of a major morale hit.

(This mechanic was inspired by the historical analysis of feudalism's rise being partly due to the need for localized defense against local threats like viking raids.)

Pricing Out a Pearl of Power

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/pricing-out-pearl-power>

October 28, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Malo Monkey wrote:

How would you go about pricing out a Pearl of Power, which in this case grants a Divine caster one extra 1st-level spell cast per day? My initial work on it seems to indicate that it should be valued at 5,000gp based on the numbers on page 118 of the core rulebook -- Permanent Effect, Use 1/day 500gp x spell level x 10.

However, relative to the values of some other magic items from Alex's old magic item value spreadsheet, 5,000gp feels low.

Am I calculating it incorrectly? Thanks in advance.

I think 5,000gp would be an appropriate price.

Here's my reasoning:

1. An item that provides for a *specific* spell 1/day costs 5,000gp.
2. A pearl of power allows you to regain *any* 1st level spell in your repertoire 1/day. As such it seems more powerful than an item that allows you to cast a specific spell. Conversely, you have to be a caster at all to use it, and it can only regain spells from your repertoire, so it seems less powerful. On balance, it's probably about equivalent.
3. The efficacy of a pearl of power is similar to the Contemplation proficiency. Imagine a Transmogrification spell that gave you the Contemplation proficiency long enough to regain 1 spell would be (Effect 20, Self x0.5, Duration 6 turns x1) 10 points or level 1. An item that allowed you to cast the Contemplation spell 1/day would cost 5,000gp. The pearl of power doesn't require an hour of concentration, so it's more powerful. However, it can only restore a 1st level spell, so it's less powerful. On balance, it's probably about equivalent.

Some Sneaky Questions

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/some-sneaky-questions>

October 29, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Gecko Lord wrote:

So I have some questions about the Thief and classes based off of it.

Starting early? Do people allow thieves to do Hijinks in a month of down time? Recently some players have been creating items or resting from resurrections. While other players have to wait or there is downtime do you let them do solo Hijinks? What do the rules say about this (personally don't see anything saying you can unless I am blind) and what was the intent behind the rules? (Look at you Alex)

Speaking of: Treasure Hunting seems to be the only Hijinks that doesn't give EXP right away. Why is this? Is this because generally these are bigger payoffs? Also what happens when someone does this Hijinks 1000 times? Surely there are not meant to be that many treasures just lying about? Should I start to give penalties with excessive use of this one?

Spells that temporary give bonus to skills: Should you allow this to be used for Hijinks? For example you spend the whole month casing out a place, planning to steal everything. You spend it getting to know the area and the people, how mister Joe takes out his dog every day after dinner. While the entire Hijinks takes a month you only need to be sneaky for a few hours at most. Again I don't see anything saying these checks represent work over the last month just that you need to make them and you find out what happens.

Why does high morale work in favor of the city but low morale doesn't for Hijinks?

Is there any downside for pardoning people over and over if you are the domain leader?

That's all I can think of now, thank you.

Can you use smuggling to remove the fees and fines for Mercantile Adventures?

Starting early? Do people allow thieves to do Hijinks in a month of down time? Recently some players have been creating items or resting from resurrections. While other players have to wait or there is downtime do you let them do solo Hijinks? What do the rules say about this (personally don't see anything saying you can unless I am blind) and what was the intent behind the rules? (Look at you Alex)

APM: Yes. I allow thieves to hijink during downtime.

Speaking of: Treasure Hunting seems to be the only Hijinks that doesn't give EXP right away. Why is this? Is this because generally these are bigger payoffs?

APM: Treasure maps are considered "magic items" for purposes of XP. "If the party recovers magic items on an adventure, and sells them without using them, they receive 1 XP per 1gp earned in the sale. If the characters use the magic items, they do not get any XP, even if they later sell them." A character who recovers a treasure map from a hijink can sell the treasure map to a buyer (at some % of the alleged value of the hoard) or can use the treasure map, and get XP from the treasure recovered thereby.

Also what happens when someone does this Hijinks 1000 times? Surely there are not meant to be that many treasures just lying about? Should I start to give penalties with excessive use of this one?

APM: Use your discretion as Judge to adjudicate this. It would be entirely reasonable to impose penalties however, for the obvious reason that there are not that many treasures lying about.

APM: In my own campaign I worked out the available treasure hoards in advance. When a treasure map was discovered, I'd randomly select one of those treasure hoards as the destination of the map. This could result in players finding maps to a hoard that had already been looted, or finding a map to a hoard they already had a map to.

Spells that temporary give bonus to skills: Should you allow this to be used for Hijinks? For example you spend the whole month casing out a place, planning to steal everything. You spend it getting to know the area and the people, how mister Joe takes out his dog every day after dinner. While the entire Hijinks takes a month you only need to be sneaky for a few hours at most. Again I don't see anything saying these checks represent work over the last month just that you need to make them and you find out what happens.

APM: No, you cannot use spells that give temporary bonuses to skills on Hijink throw. The Hijink throw is abstracting a long series of activities.

Why does high morale work in favor of the city but low morale doesn't for Hijinks?

APM: To avoid making poor slums too profitable.

Is there any downside for pardoning people over and over if you are the domain leader?

APM: There is no penalty provided for in the rules, but as Judge you certainly could impose one if it becomes warranted.

Can you use smuggling to remove the fees and fines for Mercantile Adventures?

APM: Yes.

SaruSama then wrote:

*[quote=archon]APM: Yes. I allow thieves to hijink during downtime.[/quote]
question on that as a 3rd level assassin i did a spying/blackmail hijink and it actually succeeded. I earned 3400 gold. Am i right that by raw i should be earning 3200 xp off this? It just seems weird to almost double my xp on the basis of one roll of the die.*

That's correct.

It's a risk-reward tradeoff. You can also lose your character pretty easily doing hijinks with little opportunity for your friends to help you.

Students of the Sanctums

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/students-sanctums>

November 09, 2014

Tag: Q&A

The White Sorcerer wrote:

I was reading up on sanctum's and their associated followers, the apprentices and normal men who study there. Came to the part about students leaving and new ones taking their place, and had a few questions.

Question the First: Does every student make the proficiency throw at the same time, or is the 1d6 months individual for each student?

Question the Second: Really, 1d6 months? That seems rather low for magical training. Priestesses take two years.

Question the Third: New students arrive each year, with an upper limit of 12 students at a time. Is it intentional that this limit will never be filled after the initial batch of students (and even then only if 12 were rolled), since each student either leaves or becomes an apprentice in half a year at most, so only 1-6 will ever be present at one time after the first "class?"

Thanks in advance.

1) Does every student make the proficiency throw at the same time, or is the 1d6 months individual for each student?

It's individual to the student.

2) 1d6 months? That seems rather low for magical training. Priestesses take two years.

You can (a) consider this to be simulating the differences between organized institutional teaching compared to the ability of gifted students to quickly master subject matter in informal learning environments or (b) change the rules to something you like better.

3) New students arrive each year, with an upper limit of 12 students at a time. Is it intentional that this limit will never be filled after the initial batch of students (and even then only if 12 were rolled), since each student either leaves or becomes an apprentice in half a year at most, so only 1-6 will ever be present at one time after the first "class?"

Yes, it's intentional.

Chapter 8: Monsters

An Energy Drain Alternative

<http://autarch.co/forum/energy-drain-alternative-0>

March 10, 2013

Tag: **New Material**

Alex wrote:

While sketching out ideas for a "gothic horror" campaign setting for ACKS, I came up with the following idea:

Replace each level of energy drain with 5 years of aging (10 years for dwarves, 20 years for elves). Creatures that drain 2 levels inflict 10/20/40 years of aging. If the aging is enough to push the character into a new age bracket, the sudden shock of aging requires a saving throw versus Death. Such a death will result in a character rising as an undead.

Given ACKS' punitive penalties for aging (-2 to all physical stats by age 36!), aging could serve a function quite akin to sanity in Call of Cthulhu - a slow, remorseless meter of the ongoing ruin of your character. True, your 18-year old 1st level fighter won't fear a few blows from a wight at first. But when he realizes that the grizzled ghost-hunter in the tavern that he thought was sixty years old is actually 30 - well, that's scary.

The prospect of aging will make undeath seem like a better option, doubling the terror, too.

Thoughts?

Dryad % in Lair

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/dryad-lair>

August 18, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

Thomas Weigel wrote:

Is the dryad supposed to be in her lair only 10% of the time?

Rodriguez then wrote:

I think in this case the "lair" is not her tree but a little grove with other dryads. The 10% make sure that the fluff text actually fits: "they are generally solitary, up to six dryads may be encountered in one place on rare occasions"

"rare occasions" in this case means less than 10%

Rodriguez nailed it.

One of the deadliest wandering encounters in the playtest campaign was with a lair of dryads... Heh.

Level Draining

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/level-draining>

August 16, 2012

Tag: Q&A

MichaelPfaff wrote:

Couple Points first:

A) Because of Restore Life & Limb, level-draining seems to be far more dangerous than anything that can just outright kill you.

B) Some low level monsters, like the Wight, can level drain you. This creature is worth 80XP. It can potentially take away hundreds of thousands.

C) Drained levels cannot be removed, short of ritual magic or wishes.

I like that there's something dangerous that can actually hurt or even kill a PC that's not easily fixed (most PCs above 3rd level can easily afford Restore Life & Limb).

However, I wonder if the XP value of creatures with such abilities is poorly attributed.

Shouldn't something so dangerous to low and high level characters deliver more XP? Special abilities aren't finely tuned for their "power level" in the game. A Giant Leech with a special ability to drain some blood each round does not really compare to losing a level or two.

I don't know if I'd want to go through and give each specific ability and XP value, but I'm mostly just wondering if it was ever considered to increase the XP value for creatures that level drain (or have similar devastating abilities)?

Energy drain is purposefully under-valued for XP purposes. Let me explain.

The main reason energy drain is so awful in the game is to make undead terrifying. Undead are supposed to represent "a fate worse than death." To a player, the fate worse than death is losing his hard-earned experience levels. If your party doesn't have a cleric or spells strong enough to stop energy-drainers, the appropriate response is to run.

Now, if undead were valued such that the XP gained was worth the risk of the energy drain, then they would not be terrifying. Instead, they'd simply be a high-risk high-reward monster. That would defeat the point of the game mechanic.

I would recommend reducing the power of energy drain over increasing the XP for undead. It'll be a hard challenge to find the "right" XP curve. Too little and you've confused your players as to what the appropriate reaction to undead is. Too much and you're incentivizing a cleric-heavy party equipped with protection from evil scrolls to power level.

A good alternative to level draining is to age the character. 5 years of aging instead of a lost level is a good fit.

Rolling Up a Goblin Village

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/rolling-goblin-village>

September 19, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Beragon wrote:

I'm rolling up a village of goblins.

1) Are champions, sub-chieftains, the chief, shaman, and witchdoctor in addition to the number in each gang rolled, or do they replace a goblin?

Ex: I rolled a goblin village consisting of 4 warbands. Warband #4 consists of 4 gangs:

Gang #1 = 8 goblins

Gang #2 = 5 goblins

Gang #3 = 4 goblins

Gang #4 = 3 goblins

Total: 20 goblins

This nets 4 champions and 1 sub-chieftain... are these in addition to the 20 goblins, or do they replace existing goblins?

2) There are 6 bugbear mercenaries present... do I roll treasure for them separately, in addition to rolling treasure for each warband?

Malo Monkey then wrote:

1) They are in addition to the 20 goblins. You'll find the rules for this on page 149 near the bottom of the first column.

2) I wouldn't, but I couldn't find anything in the rules on this one way or the other. You might consider that Bugbears are technically assigned treasure at the Warband level, which 6 Bugbears do not constitute. I'd likely place part of the Goblin's Treasure Type E onto the Bugbears to represent their wages from the Goblin Chieftain. But it's not going to break anything if you throw some extra silver on them beyond what the Goblins have.

Disclaimer: I am not an Autarch. YMMV.

Malo Monkey is correct on both points.

Jard then wrote:

Does anyone else break up each gang into its own room when a lair is encountered in a dungeon? Or is it generally assumed that you should be lumping all of the goblins or other appropriate monster into a single room and therefore one combat?

You are supposed to be break them out into their own rooms. From ACKS, Chapter 10, Placing Monsters:

Some types of monsters have lairs composed of a variable number of encounter groups. For example, goblins are encountered in gangs (encounter groups) of 2d4, and a goblin lair is composed of 3d6 gangs. If the stocking procedure has generated multiple encounters with a particular type of organized monster, then the dungeon should be assumed to hold a lair of that type of monster. One room in the dungeon should be chosen as the lair, and one of the monster encounters assigned to it. The other encounters rolled for that monster type should be placed nearby to form watch points, barracks, or splinter colonies. The various rooms should then be reinforced with any leaders, champions, or other creatures indicated by the monster entry. If space permits, the Judge can also add additional groups in other nearby rooms, up to the maximum number of groups that can be encountered for a lair.

EXAMPLE: Because the Judge rolled four encounters with goblin gangs, the dungeon holds a goblin lair. The Judge chooses a remote room in the rear of the dungeon as the lair, and places one goblin gang there. Nearby he places several guard posts with the other three gangs. He adds a champion to each gang, as instructed by the monster entry. The entry also states that a lair will have a chieftain, sub-chieftain, females, and young, so he adds those creatures to the lair room.

Doppleganger Attacks

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/doppelganger-attacks>

November 14, 2012

Tag: Q&A

James C. Bennett wrote:

The doppleganger isn't a monster I use very much, but I threw it into the "inhabited area" wandering monster chart I'm working on. Then, when I was writing up the stat block, I see "Attacks 1, Damage 1d12". Now, I always thought of dopplegangers as weapon-using monsters, but there are no 1d12 weapons. So, I'm kind of stumped as to what kind of attack the creature is making: growing claws and fangs? Strangling with Plasticman arms? Supernaturally strong punch? I was wondering how the rest of you out there describe a doppleganger's attacks.

Also, "HD 4, Save As F10"? What a weird monster.

I run Dopplegangers as crazy creepy things.

To understand the doppleganger's 1d12 bite attack, imagine a normal-looking human face. Then imagine that face's jaw suddenly extending and the mouth widening to create a huge gaping maw filled with hideous sharp teeth with the clenching strength of a pit viper. Something like the Spiderman villain Venom.

To understand the saving throw, think of something like the liquid metal Terminator from T2. You try to burn it, it's skin sheds off and reforms. You try to cut it, and it bends under your blade. You try to choke it, and its trachea moves. You try to charm it, and its brain reconfigures to alien shapes. The saving throws are amazing because of the monster's incredible ability to alter its form.

Morale for NPC Parties

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/morale-npc-parties>

December 05, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

James C. Bennett wrote:

How do you determine morale for members of NPC parties and other leveled NPC opponents? I can't imagine an 11th-level pirate king has a -2 morale.

Referencing the morale of mercenaries, we can note that 0-level heavy infantry have ML +0 and 1st level veteran mercenaries have ML +1. A 5th level fighter-type increases ML of his retainers by an additional +1.

So I'd suggest as a rule of thumb that an NPC party of 1st-4th level has ML+1, and if 5th level or above, +2. If one of the NPCs has an appropriate proficiency or class power, you could raise this again.

Damage For Disarmed Monsters

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/damage-disarmed-monsters>

March 17, 2013

Tag: **New Material**

Beastman wrote:

Are there any guidelines for unarmed damage for monsters that are disarmed of their weapons? for example, the ettin: the monster entry is attacks: 2 clubs. damage: 3d6 / 2d6. So what is the damage of an ettin without a club?

The only indication of unarmed damage is for human-sized (assume 6' tall) creatures: unarmed strikes deal 1d3 nonlethal damage with a punch or 1d4 nonlethal damage with a kick. Assuming an ettin being 12' tall, extrapolation would assume that the ettin punches for 1d6 (or 2d3) and kicks for 1d8 (or 2d4) damage. But this doesn't look right, because a bugbear also does 2d4.

I posted these notes in the Orc Custom Class thread. They should help address the issues you are raising:

Bugbears (AC 4 and 2d4 damage)

+1 natural strength bonus, +3 natural armor bonus.

One-handed weapon (1d6) and shield

Dwarf (AC 5 and 1d8 damage)

Battle axe wielded two-handed (1d8) and banded plate armor

Elf (AC 4 and 1d8 damage)

Spear or sword wielded two-handed (1d8) and chain mail armor

Ettin (AC 6 and 2d8/3d6 damage)

+6 natural strength bonus / +7 natural strength bonus, +5 natural armor bonus

Spiked club (1d6) in each hand and hide armor

Gnome (AC 4 and 1d6 damage)

One-handed weapon (1d6), shield, and scale armor

Gnoll (AC 4 and 2d4 damage)

+1 natural strength bonus, +1 natural armor bonus

One-handed weapon (1d6), shield, and leather armor

Goblin (AC 3 and 1d6 damage)
One-handed weapon (1d6), shield, and leather armor

Hill Giant (AC 5 and 2d8)
+5 natural strength bonus, +3 natural armor bonus
Spear wielded two-handed (1d8)

Hobgoblin (AC 3 and 1d8 damage)
Spear wielded two-handed (1d8) and scale armor

Kobold (AC 2 and 1d4)
-1 natural strength penalty
Small weapon wielded two-handed (1d6) and leather armor

Ogre (AC 4 and 1d10 damage)
+3 natural strength bonus, +3 natural armor bonus
Club (1d4), fur armor

Orc (AC 3 and 1d6 damage)
One-handed weapon, shield, and leather armor

Note #1: Damage bonuses are converted into dice by adding the bonus to the average die roll than mapping it to a new larger or smaller die.

$1d4+3 = 1d10$

$1d6-1 = 1d4$

$1d6+1 = 2d4$ (technically should be 1d8, but making it 2d4 differentiates it from using a medium weapon two-handed)

$1d8+5 = 2d8$

Note #2: Dwarves and elves arguably should get a fighter damage bonus of +1 to their weapons. If you believe that should be the case (e.g. they aren't members of some slightly-less-than-elite class which has traded this damage bonus away), then their equipment load-out is:

Dwarf: One-handed weapon and shield, chainmail armor (AC4)

Elf: One-handed weapon and shield, lightweight chainmail armor (AC3)

Punches normally deal 1d3 nonlethal damage while kicks normally deal 1d4 nonlethal damage; neither attack can be used against characters in metal armor. However, monsters with natural armor may deal lethal damage and can punch or kick characters in metal armor without taking damage.

Monsters With Classes

<http://www.autarch.co/forum/monsters-classes-0>

March 15, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Beastman wrote:

Hi @all,

Any advice of how to add a class to a monster. Say that I want to create a 2nd level bugbear thief or a 4th level bugbear thief.

Would this be right?

Bugbear's HD: 3+1 (3d8+1)

Level 2 Bugbear Thief: 3+1 HD (?) with 2d6 (thief) + 1d8+1 (bugbear's) (?)

Level 4 Bugbear Thief: 4+1 HD (?) with 4d6 (thief) +1 (bugbear-bonus)(?)

Attack throws: higher score of bugbear and thief (?)

Are there any rules for ACKS or BECMI (I think there were some for BECMI but i can't remember where....)

Hi Beastman!

Do you want to add a class to a monster for purposes of creating a more interesting opponent, or are you seeking to create a monstrous PC for a player?

If you want to add a class to a monster NPC:

1) The easiest thing is simply to give it whatever powers you'd like it to have. For instance, you'd simply assign the 3d8+1 HD bugbear the powers of a 2nd level thief, or 4th level thief, or whatever you'd like. If you want it to be tougher, just give it extra d8s of HD. It would fight and save as a monster of its HD.

2) If you want a more complex approach, you can check out the rules on Reincarnation (in the Spells Chapter) and Transformation (in the Additional Rules section of the Secrets Chapter).

If you want to let someone play a monstrous PC:

1) Use the rules for Reincarnation and Transformation, as above. These rules would let you start with a 3HD bugbear with the powers of a 3rd level thief, and then, e.g., level him up to a 6HD bugbear with the powers of a 6th level thief.

2) Wait for the Player's Companion, which will have rules for building monstrous characters. As a question of game theory, ACKS does not assume that race and class are distinct, nor does it assume that all classes are created equal. A powerful monster effectively IS a class with a level equal to its HD and a very slow XP curve. Adding more powers is thus just created a new "monstrous class". The approach is probably closest to that in the BECMI Gazetteer Orcs of Thar and/or 3.5's Savage Species, and is very different to that found in AD&D, AD&D 2nd Edition, or Core 3.5.

Beastman then wrote:

Thanks for replying.

I don't want players to play monstrous PCs! Never was a friend of drow-PCs, orc-PCs or whatever... I just wanted to add a class to an existing monster. So in your answer you say that the easiest thing is to give a monster whatever powers I like. I can do this for sure. But how would this affect the number of XP the PCs earn? Say, for example, that I assign the bugbear the powers of a 4th level thief. How many XP is this bugbear worth?

Is the bugbear treated as a 4HD creature or is he still a 3+1 HD but with asterisks (i.e. the special powers of his thief class; and if so, how many asterisks does he get?

Thanks

In general, giving a monster the powers of an assassin, fighter, explorer, cleric, or thief would be worth one asterisk. Giving it the powers of a mage is worth two asterisks.

So a large, nasty 4HD orc with the spell-casting powers of a 4th level mage would be 4**.

Try this thread:

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/orc-custom-classes>

Basilisk Gaze Attack Mechanics?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/basilisk-gaze-attack-mechanics>

October 17, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Weron wrote:

How often, and when, do you have to save vs petrifying gaze while fighting a basilisk?

As far as I can tell, the relevant section is:

"Petrifying Gaze: A victim that meets a monster's petrifying gaze is required to make a saving throw versus Petrification or turn to stone. Any opponents surprised by the monster will meet its gaze, as will those attacking it without averting their eyes or using a mirror."

So far so good: save if surprised or attacking. But then the basilisk entry has:

"Attacks: 2 (bite, gaze)

Damage: 1d10/petrify"

Which says that the gaze is an attack it can make once per round.

How does this work?

(And as a side, if you are not surprised and not attacking, can you look at the basilisk as much as you like without effect?)

Jard then wrote:

"attacking it without averting their eyes or using a mirror."

To me this says that if you attempt to blind fight you won't be subject to the gaze, which I believe carries a -4 penalty. Not sure what a mirror would entail, perhaps only -1 or -2?

As for 1d10/petrify, if you read the basilisk entry you'll see that their bite ALSO petrifies, so that person looking away and swinging wildly with their sword is not that far away from getting petrified anyway. I'm not an autarch but my interpretation is that every time YOU attack, if you're not taking some sort of penalty for averting your eyes, you are subject to a saving throw. At all other times, i would assume you are averting your eyes except for right at the beginning of the fight if you are surprised.

During interaction, I handle it the same way Jarl does. This makes for delightful role-play. During combat, a saving throw versus Petrification is required:

- When surprised by the creature
- When attacking the creature without averting your eyes or using a mirror

Weron then wrote:

I suggest then that the basilisk entry be clarified. To be similar to the medusa it should say something like

"Attacks: 1 (bite or special)

Damage: 1d10/petrify"

And a question from my players: How do you know to avert your eyes the first time you meet a basilisk? Especially if you are not a long-time gamer and have no idea what this monster is? ("It looks at you - save vs petrification!" is apparently not clear enough.)

Thanks.

"And a question from my players: How do you know to avert your eyes the first time you meet a basilisk? Especially if you are not a long-time gamer and have no idea what this monster is? ("It looks at you - save vs petrification!" is apparently not clear enough.)"

You don't. When a new monster with petrification is encountered, it's not uncommon for several party members or henchmen to be petrified.

If that's harsh for you:

- You can rule that Adventuring proficiency covers this knowledge
- You can allow a Lore mastery or Knowledge proficiency throw
- You can plant lots of "statues" around the encounter to give a hint

Lair Treasures

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/lair-treasures>

November 09, 2013

Tag: Q&A

golan2072 wrote:

Are the monster treasure values for a single monster, or for a whole Lair (taking into account all monsters in it)? For example, is the Stirge's Treasure F for each Stirge, or for their whole Nest of 3d12?

If so, is the treasure value calculated according to the sum XP value of the average number of monsters in the lair?

Treasure Type is per lair, except where otherwise noted (e.g. "per warband").

As for how the values were calculated--some serious math went into these, for which Tavis Allison should be thanked!

Tavis realized that if we simply calculate average treasure based on the xp per monster, it would yield below-the-recommended level because many monsters have no treasure type. He therefore did the math so that the average treasure works out across ALL monsters at different levels.

golan2072 then wrote:

So, if I want to create a new monster, how do I calculate its treasure?

Use (# in lair) x (XP value) x 4 and then choose a treasure type that approximates that.

Rhynn then wrote:

Is there a rough % of monsters that are expected to not have treasure? Obviously it's very vague, since different monsters will be encountered at different rates... did you just go off the total number of monsters, or did you try to account for the likelihood of encountering specific monsters? Are they e.g. balanced by terrain type?

Rhyn, we used the distribution for dungeon levels as our guide, rather than the distribution for wilderness encounters. So the treasure types are balanced on a dungeon level by dungeon level basis.

Treasure Outside of a Lair

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/treasure-outside-lair>

November 27, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Jay O' Bedlam wrote:

Hi there! New player here, recently picked up ACKS in the OSR Bundle of Holding, loved it so much I got the Players Companion as well. Drafting up encounters for a sandbox game now and looking to rope my 4E players in for some hex crawling mayhem as soon as possible.

So I've got some questions regarding how much treasure to award players for defeating enemies outside of their lair. I understand that the way the random treasure generator is set up is for dungeon crawling, and takes into account random encounters not generating wealth, and assumes the encounter is a lair. But let's say I encounter, for example, a gang of 2d4 bandits in an abandoned wizards tower. Their treasure score is H, but that is for a whole lairs worth. How should I work out the reward for the players? Just wing it? Award the 4:1 ratio in gold to XP in GP? Or is there a way of doing it randomly (I like random treasure haha!)

Hi Jay! I'm thrilled to hear that you are giving ACKS a try. I hope it plays well for you. Let us know if you have any questions. The "Ask the Autarchs" forum is pretty active for rules Q&A.

Per your question, what you could do is calculate the XP value of the monsters, multiply by 4, and then find a treasure type that has an average treasure of about that amount (or some percentage).

So for instance, 5 bandits (10XP each) are worth 50XP. That's about 1/5th of Treasure Type A, so you could roll on TTA and divide the results by 5.

Petrification - A Painful Observation

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/petrification-painful-observation>

December 02, 2013

Tag: **Insight**

OrcStompRunner wrote:

So, apparently it's been a LONG time since I dealt with petrification in old school play.

My wife had her Elf Courtier pecked by a cockatrice on Thanksgiving Day.

While I was researching her options I noted that having a Flesh to Stone spell cast costs 4,500gp!

Wow! A PC would be better off dead for sure! A friendly cleric Restore Life & Limb by comparison is a "paltry" 500gp. (Though with side effects.) Those greedy mages always sticking it to "the man".

Am I missing something obvious that makes recovering her character from this less painful than it seems? Are there other routes I'm overlooking or a divine equivalent I've forgotten? Is this just the price of petrification?

Petrification is simply dreadful... It's very expensive and difficult to recover from. The only benefit is that you don't have to roll on the horrific Tampering with Mortality table.

Dinosaur Hit Dice

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/dinosaur-hit-dice>

December 22, 2013

Tag: **New Material**

golan2072 wrote:

I'll soon start dealing with dinosaur stats for my barbarian Conqueror King setting. However, the question arises whether the high hit dice of the ACKS core-book dinosaurs are justified. After all, a Stegosaurus has more HD (11) than an Adult dragon (10), and a T-Rex has the same HD (20) as a Venerable dragon. While this was one of the largest land predators to walk the Earth, should it have as much HD as a massive fantastic dragon?

I ask myself this question every single day. This is true of a large number of creatures in ACKS, actually. Another example is sperm whales. The HD of all of these creatures were based on values from B/X D&D.

When I began working on Lairs & Encounters I derived a formula that provides the "hit dice from weight" of a creature.

Consider that in ACKS, HD represent 2 things: 1) sheer mass, with commensurate ability to absorb damage; 2) fighting prowess. Contrasting an 8HD hill giant with a 9HD elephant, it seems like more of the hill giant's HD represent fighting prowess while more of the elephant's HD represent mass. But how much?

With that in mind, here's the formula:

$$\text{HD from Weight} = \text{Weight}^{0.4} / 10$$

For these purposes each HD = 4 hp, so 1+1HD = 1.25, 1-1HD=0.75, etc.

Let's consider two creatures of different mass but the same HD, a man and a goblin.

Goblin (1-1HD, 50lb): $50^{0.4} / 10 = 0.48$. A goblin gets 1/2HD from its mass and the other 1/4HD from its ferocity.

Human (1-1HD, 150lb): $150^{0.4} / 10 = 0.75$. A normal man gets all of his HD from his mass.

Now let's consider two creatures that weigh the same but have very different HD, a donkey and a tiger.

Tiger (6HD, 500lb): $500^{0.4} / 10 = 1.2$. A tiger gets 1+1 HD from its mass. The other 4+3HD are from its ferocity.

Donkey (1.5HD, 500lb): $500^{0.4} / 10 = 1.2$. A donkey gets 1+1 HD from its mass, and the last +1 (1hp) are from its ferocity.

So far so good. But now consider:

Venerable Dragon (20HD, 36,000lb): $36,000^{0.4} / 10 = 6.65$. A venerable dragon gets 6+3 HD from its mass, and the other 13+1 HD from its ferocity.

Sperm Whale (36HD, 120,000lb): $120,000^{0.4} / 10 = 10.76$. A sperm whale gets 10+3 HD from its mass, and the other 25 HD from its ferocity.

It seems reasonable that a dragon gets twice as many ferocity HD as it does weight HD. Does it make sense for a sperm whale? We'd be forced to conclude that a sperm whale is far more ferocious than a dragon!

Another way of thinking about the same problem is to calculate what a creature's weight exponent is, relative to its HD, such that $\text{weight} = (\text{HD} \times 10)^{\text{Weight Exponent}}$.

A normal man has a weight exponent of ~ 2.5 .

A dragon, horse, and a sperm whale have a weight exponent of ~ 2.0 .

A tyrannosaurus rex has a weight exponent of ~ 1.8 .

A tiger has a weight exponent of ~ 1.5 .

We could, of course, make dragons weigh less while keeping their HD the same (they are fictional creatures of course!) but most people seem to want and envision Smaug-sized dragons at the high end.

If dragons were as tough, pound-for-pound, as T-Rexes, their HD would look like this:

Spawn: 2+3

Very Young: 5+3

Young: 9

Juvenile: 12+2

Adult: 15+3

Mature Adult: 19+1

Old: 23

Very Old: 26+2

Ancient: 30

Venerable: 34

Hugest Venerable: 40

If dinosaurs were only as tough, pound-for-pound, as dragons, then a t-rex would have 12+1 HD.

How Much Can a Tame Dinosaur Carry?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/how-much-can-tame-dinosaur-carry>

December 22, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

golan2072 wrote:

In my Barbarian Conqueror King setting, some dinosaurs serve as beasts of burden, particularly Ankylosauruses, Triceratops, Edmontosauruses and even Alamosauruses. How much can they carry?

Normal load is generally 0.020 of body weight for quadrupeds and 0.033 of body weight for bipeds.

A heavy horse (2,000lbs) has a normal load of 40 stone. A donkey (500lb) has a normal load of 10 stone.

Attack Routines - 1 Attack Throw or 3?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/attack-routines-1-attack-throw-or-3>

June 13, 2014

Tag: **Q&A**

Brandonshire wrote:

I feel almost certain that the answer is somewhere in the books, probably even somewhere obvious, but I can't seem to find the answer. When a monster or character (like my Thrassian Gladiator) has an attack routine, like claw, claw, bite, does one just make one attack throw and then make all three attacks (if you hit), or do you make a separate attack throw or each part of the routine?

Each is rolled separately. Sorry I didn't make it clearer!

Any Tips For Converting Swords & Wizardry Monsters?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/any-tips-converting-swords-wizardry-monsters>

April 07, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Calum wrote:

I realized recently that (somehow) I have a copy of The Tome of Horrors Complete for S&W. I don't run S&W, but I will be running ACKS pretty soon, and all those extra monster choices could help keep things interesting for myself and my players.

To my untrained eye, S&W and ACKS look pretty similar in terms of mechanics, so I wanted to check in here and ask if there are any significant differences or difficulties in conversion that I should be aware of ...

Thanks to anyone who can chime on on this.

Jard then wrote:

I'm resurrecting this thread because I bought more swords and wizardry products and gained some additional insight.

*Swords and Wizardry monsters have an HD and a Challenge level (CL). The difference between HD and CL is, by and large, the number of special abilities. thus, a 5HD creature with a 9CL would be equivalent to an HD5**** monster in ACKs.*

Treasure is another issue entirely. Reading my own advice, it's somewhat incomplete. It would be easier if there were some kind of general guidelines for how much XP correlates to which kind of hoard.

For example, if I'm looking at a S&W monster that i've determined is a raider-type with 3HD, I'd probably just use whatever hoard level bugbears use, but is there a more general way to state this? Is there some relationship between either A) the XP value of a single bugbear or B) the average XP of a bugbear gang... and the average GP value of their per-warband hoard?

You can develop a treasure type using the following formula:

$$(\text{average number of creatures encountered in group}) \times (\text{xp} / \text{creature}) \times 4 = \text{average treasure value of group}$$

Example: A gnome company has an average of $(1d8 \times 1d10) = (4.5 \times 5.5) = 24.75$ gnomes. Each gnome is worth 10xp. $24.75 \times 10 = 247\text{xp}$. $247 \times 4 = 988\text{gp}$. The Judge assigns each gnome company Treasure Type D, which has an average value of 1,000gp.

This formula does not work precisely for every monster in ACKS - for various reasons including historical legacy, reputation for treasure or lack thereof, etc., some treasure types are skewed. But for new or converted monsters it's a very good rule of thumb.

Humanoid Weights

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/humanoid-weights>

August 15, 2014

Tag: **New Material**

The Dark wrote:

After putting together the calculations a while back on the percentage of each species that are combatants, I wanted to piece together estimated average weights for various bipedal intelligent species. After all, we have rules for what various mounts (both ground and aerial) can carry, so knowing how large a potential rider is could be important. I used a combination of the ACKS book and some other editions of the game that ACKS evolved from, so here are estimates (insert IANAA and all other appropriate disclaimers) of the weight of different bipedal intelligent beings from the core book:

Bugbear: 25 stone

Dwarf: 15 stone

Elf: 13 stone

*Gnoll: 30 stone**

Gnome: 4 stone

Goblin: 4 stone

Halfling: 3 stone

Hobgoblin: 20 stone

Kobold: 3 stone

Lizardman: 22 stone

Man: 15 stone

Neanderthal: 17 stone

Ogre: 60 stone

Orc: 17 stone

Troll: 50 stone

(= creature's weight is provided in its description)*

Some thoughts on some of the logic:

Man is around 15 stone on average. Dwarf "weighs as much as adult humans." Elf should be slightly lighter, since they are short and lithe (and 12 stone would work too). Neanderthal is slightly heavier, and it makes sense to me that Orc is the mass of Neanderthal. Hobgoblin is somewhat larger, and Bugbear larger still, due to increased hit dice (and the Bugbear description noting its bulk). Gnome and Goblin are the same size, as are Kobold and Halfling, just to appeal to my sense of symmetry. Lizardman are tall and have a tail, so they should be fairly heavy. Gnoll is listed as averaging 7'6" and 300 pounds, which is a crosscheck when creating other creatures' weights. Troll and Ogre are increasingly large (8' and 9'-10'), and should be correspondingly larger than a Gnoll.

Humanoids I have briefly thought about but haven't tried to place in this schema yet: Morlock, Minotaur, Cyclops, Ettin, Faerie, Mermen, Thoghrin, Troglodyte.

Note that giants' weights are all in their descriptions, so adding them is unnecessary.

Here are some monster weights from Lairs & Encounters Worksheets v14 (unpublished material, still under development):

Beastmen:

Bugbear - 400lbs
Centaur - 2,100lbs
Gnoll - 300lbs
Goblin - 45lbs
Hobgoblin - 215lbs
Kobold - 40lbs
Lizardman - 250lbs
Mermen - 400lbs
Minotaur - 700lbs
Ogre - 600lbs
Orc - 200lbs
Troglodyte - 150lbs

Giants:

Cyclops - 7,800lbs
Ettin - 2,800lbs
Cloud Giant - 7000lb
Fire Giant - 3,200lb
Frost Giant - 2,800lb
Hill Giant - 1,100lb
Stone Giant - 1,500lb
Storm Giant - 12,000lb

Demi-Human:

Dwarf - 150lbs
Elf - 115lbs
Gnome - 65lbs
Halfling - 45lbs
Morlock - 150lbs
Neanderthal - 220lbs

Chapter 9: Treasure

Selling Gems and Jewelry

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/selling-gems-and-jewelry>

April 10, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

Player's find gems, jewelry or other goods worth X while on an adventure, and a magic item they don't want.

When they get to town, if they want to get gp for the magic item, they use the table on page 227. What about the gems and jewelry? Do they also use that chart (and spend time trying to find a buyer, etc)? I kind of assume it's intended that way because why would you find someone with 10K to drop on a gem you found instantly upon returning to a village? Also, the chart on page 227 includes items of less than 500gp value which I'm pretty sure is the lowest value a magic item could have.

In general you can let your players automatically find a buyer for gems/jewelry because they're being bought for their currency value. The merchant's guild would just as well hold diamonds as gold pieces. If they're in a small hamlet or village, then perhaps not.

That said, there's little incentive to sell them: You get XP for them without selling them, and they're more portable than gold.

Treasure Types, Small Clarification

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/treasure-types-small-clarification>

July 05, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Thomas Weigel wrote:

In the website treasure generation thread, something was mentioned in passing that I thought I would ask about, in the form of three examples:

Treasure Type D lists "15% chance of any 2" magic items. Does this mean (a) roll 1d100 once, if it is a 15 or less, there are two items, or (b) roll 1d100 twice, and each 15 or less results in an item?

Treasure Type N lists "50% any 4 + 1 potion + 1 scroll," which is slightly different than the usual way of listing multiple types. If D is (a), above, is N also intended to be a single roll?

Treasure Type R lists "75% 1d3 of each category". If D is (a), above, is that rolling a single 1d100, and if it's 75 or less, you get the whole batch? Of D is (b), above, does that mean rolling 1d100 1d3 times per category, or rolling 1d100 once per category?

My perception of the website generator (without seeing the source) is that the interpretation is (b) for D and N, and "one 1d100 roll per category" for R.

I was also wrong. The website generator appears to use (a) in all cases, even R (you get the whole batch of 1d3 in six categories on a single 71- roll).

I don't know if that changed since last week, or if my impression of what was going on was that off, but it looks like the authoritative answer vis-a-vis the treasure generator is (a) in all cases. One roll shall rule them all.

Hello!

Treasure Type D lists "15% chance of any 2" magic items. Does this mean (a) roll 1d100 once, if it is a 15 or less, there are two items, or (b) roll 1d100 twice, and each 15 or less results in an item?

APM: Roll 1d100 once, and if it is 15 or less there are two items.

Treasure Type N lists "50% any 4 + 1 potion + 1 scroll," which is slightly different than the usual way of listing multiple types. If D is (a), above, is N also intended to be a single roll?

APM: Roll 1d100 once, and if it is 50% or less there are 4 items, 1 potion, and 1 scroll.

Treasure Type R lists "75% 1d3 of each category". If D is (a), above, is that rolling a single 1d100, and if it's 75 or less, you get the *whole* batch? Or D is (b), above, does that mean rolling 1d100 1d3 times per category, or rolling 1d100 once per category?

APM: Roll 1d100 once per category. On a roll of 75% or less, there are 1d3 items.

As a closing thought, the treasure tables were designed to work without the aid of a computer, so the rules as written favor fewer rolls over greater. If you are using a computer program and wanted to invert the rules, so that, e.g., for Treasure Type R you roll 1d3 for each category, then roll 75% for each, you will overall get better results (by better, I mean "less swingy").

I might actually talk to Tim, our programmer, about changing the TT generator to conform to the above, rather than to the rules as written, since convenience and time don't matter much to the computer!

Detecting Enemies and Permanency

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/detecting-enemies-and-permanency>

July 15, 2012

Tag: Q&A

jedavis wrote:

Hello all,

My party recently had the good fortune to find a Wand of Detecting Enemies, but we have a couple of questions about how it's supposed to work.

First, we have interpreted the text as meaning that enemies can be detected through walls / ignoring line of sight, out to the range of the spell. Is this correct?

Second, the party wizard recently found a Scroll of Permanency, and wants to do spell research to create the spell Detect Enemies, acting as the wand's effect, which he would then permanentize on himself. I expected Detect Enemies to be in the ACKSPC, given that there were a host of other detection spells, but did not find it. What would be a reasonable base cost of "detect creatures with hostile intent" in the spell creation rules?

Yes, Detect Enemies will detect enemies that are outside line of sight. Enemies that are inside line of sight usually are less difficult to detect, after all!

I didn't create a separate spell for Detect Enemies because it is more-or-less Detect Evil; evil in ACKS is relative to the creature's intent towards you.

Silver as the Standard

<http://www.autarch.co/forum/silver-standard-0>

March 10, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Beragon wrote:

I'd like to have silver as the most used coin in my campaign. I'm thinking of converting everything listed in GP as SP instead... PCs would start out with 3d6 SP... arcane casters must spend 1,000 sp per level to switch spells in their repertoire... and so on.

Are there any pitfalls to doing this?

Beragon, if you want a silver standard, don't adjust any of the prices -- just change the treasures to always give coins of one level cheaper, but ten times as many in volume.

1) All the prices are already accurate to a standard of 1 silver penny (British) = 1 silver piece. It works out that 1 Pound is worth about 24gp. Converting them to a yet lower silver standard would actually make silver more valuable in ACKS than it was in the real world.

2) The weight of coins in ACKS is 1/10th the weight of coins in B/X D&D and AD&D. So, if you took a 100gp hoard in B/X, it would weigh 10lb. In ACKS, a 1,000sp hoard weighs 10lb. 1,000sp = 100gp.

So all you have to do to have a "silver standard" is just have the treasure be mostly copper and silver. The rest takes care of itself.

How Powerful Should +X Weapons Be?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/how-powerful-should-x-weapons-be>

November 04, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

A thing came up in a recent game and I've been mulling over it ever since.

Basically, in the B/X game, there are no rules (that I'm aware of) for specifically damaging inanimate objects. It's all Judge's discretion.

Now, in later editions, objects get codified and what you can cut through (barring something like Adamantine in 3.x) is very specific. And frankly, the magic sword is only +X better than a normal one. Yet in fantasy narratives, magic weapons routinely cut chains or other swords, even doors in some cases.

So, how powerful should they be? Should a magic sword cut normal steel like butter? Could you use it to sunder an oaken beam across a door? Could it cut into a mundane safe?

Should there be a gradation? +1 weapons could cut through wood, +2 stone, +3 metal?

I realize that opening this door might give the players tools to overcome regular challenges more easily, but at the same time it might make the weapons more impressive and interesting beyond their 5% incremental improvement?

Tywyll, in Domains at War, I tackle the hardness of different materials in the context of SHP.

SHP: A structure's ability to remain intact despite damage is determined by its **structural hit points (shp)**. When a structure reaches 0 or less shp, it will collapse in 1d10 rounds. As a rule of thumb, a structure will have 1 shp per ton of weight.

Wooden structures are harder to damage than creatures. Man-sized weapons and light ballista cannot deal damage to wooden structures. Huge creatures and magic deal only 1/5th damage to wooden structures. Artillery heavier than light ballista, as well as gigantic and larger creatures, deal normal damage to wooden structures.

Stone and earthen structures are even harder to damage. Wood-throwing artillery and huge creatures cannot even deal damage. Stone-throwing artillery and gigantic creatures deal only 1/10th damage to stone structures. Colossal creatures and magic deal only 1/5th damage to stone structures. Petards (see above) deal normal damage to stone.

You could allow for each +1 to reduce the difficulty of harming a structure by one tier of hardness. So, for example, man-sized +1 magical weapons deal 1/5th damage to wood but cannot harm stone. Man-sized +2 magical weapons deal full damage to wood and 1/10th damage to stone. Man-sized +3 magical weapons deal full damage to wood and 1/5th damage to stone.

As a rule of thumb, a structure has only 1shp per ton of weight, so most wooden objects (doors, chests) will have 1shp and most stone objects 1-3hp. That means that wooden objects can be destroyed with 2 swings of a +1 item or a single stroke of a +1 item, while stone objects would take a few strikes from a +2 item and a couple from a +3.

This is just me musing so please don't take it as official rules!

How Much is a Wizard's Spellbook Worth?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/how-much-wizards-spellbook-worth>

November 11, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

One that that was a fairly big staple back in the day was getting a dead wizard's spell book for scribing and then selling for the vast amount of gold it was worth.

Formula for spells don't seem to have an intrinsic cost in ACKS, though I know my players are willing to shell out big cash for new spells since they despise the random spell on level up (Hold Portal?!?).

So how much does it cost to buy a formula, or pay someone to teach you a spell? If you kill a wizard and take their spell book, how much is that worth?

I love the fact that you guys enjoy digging deep into the economics.

By having a spellbook, you avoid the cost of having to research the spell yourself. So the value of a spellbook is equal to the cost of learning a spell without a spellbook. What is that cost?

- a) A scroll with a market cost of 1,000gp/level will suffice to learn a spell.
- b) Conducting spell research costs 1,000gp/level plus 500gp/level in special components plus the mage's time (~ 2,000gp/week for an assumed 9th level mage). So for spells not available on scrolls, the cost would be 1,500gp/level (base + special components) + 4,000gp/level (mage's time, where each spell level takes 2 weeks) or 5,500gp per level.

I will presume that spellbooks cannot be rented due to (a) the risk of theft and casualty, and (b) the desire of spellcasters-for-hire and mages guilds to avoid having magical secrets spread too widely.

Since you can't rent it out, once you've used the spellbook, it's of no further value to you. So the value of a spellbook is equal to 1,000gp/level for common spells and 5,500gp/level for rare spells. [To the extent you think spellbooks would be rented out in libraries or 'spellbooks-as-service' the value might be more, or less, depending on supply v. demand.]

Thus per the above example, lets assume an 8th level mage with full spell repertoire and no INT-bonus: 3x 1st level spells, 3x 2nd level spells, 2x 3rd level spells and 2x 4th level spells. All are common spells.

$$3 \times 1000 \times 1 = 3000\text{gp}$$

$$3 \times 1000 \times 2 = 6000\text{gp}$$

$$2 \times 1000 \times 3 = 6000\text{gp}$$

$$2 \times 1000 \times 4 = 8000\text{gp}$$

$$\text{Total: } 23,000\text{gp}$$

This is certainly a nice sum, but its not a king's ransom. It's about 4 talents of gold, or less than the cost of a tower.

In contrast, let's consider the dreaded iron-bound Books of Sebek, which holds the terrible and secret spells that evil sorcerer-king created in his life. Let's assume Sebek is a 14th level caster, that his standard repertoire had common spells, his INT bonus was used on custom spells. The Books of Sebek would be worth:

Common Spells:

$$4 \times 1000 \times 1 = 4,000\text{gp}$$

$$4 \times 1000 \times 2 = 8,000\text{gp}$$

$$4 \times 1000 \times 3 = 12,000\text{gp}$$

$$4 \times 1000 \times 4 = 16,000\text{gp}$$

$$3 \times 1000 \times 5 = 15,000\text{gp}$$

$$3 \times 1000 \times 6 = 18,000\text{gp}$$

Custom Spells:

$$3 \times 5500 \times 1 = 16,500\text{gp}$$

$$3 \times 5500 \times 2 = 33,000\text{gp}$$

$$3 \times 5500 \times 3 = 49,500\text{gp}$$

$$3 \times 5500 \times 4 = 66,000\text{gp}$$

$$3 \times 5500 \times 5 = 82,500\text{gp}$$

$$3 \times 5500 \times 6 = 99,000\text{gp}$$

$$\text{Total: } 459,500\text{gp}$$

A vast sum, no doubt, but there will be perhaps 1 Sebek-level mage in each empire.

To add to the above, I've ignored the chance of spell failure (which would drive up the price of custom spells), but also ignored the use of low-wage apprentices (which would drive it down).

I've also ignored the possibility that over years and years, a vast library of spellbooks might be accumulated by particular institutions, such that the marginal cost of learning common spells would drop to 0 (e.g. less than cost of production) through an abundance of supply. One can easily imagine a world where the Mage's Guild lets any member use its library and learn the common spells at their leisure.

Of course, we know from our own history that the vast majority of historical works have not survived to pass on to us. We possess only a fraction of the writing of the ancient and medieval world. Theft, casualty, fire, pillage, and simple physical decay would all argue against such an accumulation of knowledge. Given ACKS' assumptions about how spell knowledge works, it's probably also true that very very old spellbooks might become completely unusable simply because the spirits they referenced are faded, the signs of the zodiac have changed too much, and so on.

Anyway, this is all just a thought exercise. There's a lot of directions you can go. For official purposes, I think 1000gp/level and 5,500gp/level (or perhaps 5,000gp/level for easier math) is a good baseline for standard and custom spells.

Potion Tasting

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/potion-tasting>

December 19, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

stacktrace wrote:

The treasure section says that potions can sometimes be identified by tasting them. The Dwarven Brewing proficiency grants an 11+ to identify potions by taste.

Is the text on tasting potions in the treasure section just an oblique reference to characters with the Dwarven Brewing proficiency, or do all adventurers have a chance to identify potions by taste. If the later, any good rules of thumb that does not invalidate the Dwarven Brewing prof. ?

In the text, I was alluding to a "player knowledge" situation. When I run ACKS, I generally describe each potion by taste, smell, and color. Players who have previously encountered a similar potion, and identified the potion, might be able to identify the potion based on what I describe. It's strictly a player knowledge aspect.

For example, healing potions created by the priests of Ammonar tend to be the color of maple syrup and have a sweet, vanilla scent. A character with Alchemy proficiency will remember this if he makes his roll. A player might learn it in the course of play.

Magical Rings, Cloaks, Armor of Protection

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/magical-rings-cloaks-armor-protection>

November 11, 2012

Tag: Q&A

MichaelPfaff wrote:

Do these stack? Let's say I had a ring of protection +2, cloak of protection +2, plate armor +2, shield +2. What would my AC be?

These all stack. Your AC would be $(2)+(2)+(6+2)+(1+2)=15$.

If you are going to compare the maximum possible AC, to be fair you need to compare it against maximum possible attack throw.

14th level Bladedancer

Bracers of Armor (base AC 7)

DEX 18 (AC +3)

Bladedancer AC Bonus (AC +3)

Swashbuckling (AC +3 at Level 13)

Ring of Protection +3 (AC +3)

Cloak of Protection +3 (AC +3)

Shimmer (AC +2)

= AC 24

14th level Fighter, Attack Throw 1+

STR 18 +3, Attack Throw -2

Fighting with Two Weapons, Attack Throw -3

Two Weapon Fighting Proficiency, Attack Throw -4

+3 weapon in right hand, Attack Throw -7

+3 weapon in left hand, Attack Throw -10

Berserkergang, Attack Throw -12

Bless, Attack Throw -13

Inspired Courage, Attack Throw -14

The fighter will hit on an attack throw of 10+.

MichaelPfaff then wrote:

Yeah, I'm actually starting to have issues with this. The min-maxing of the 14th Level Fighter might work out in theory, but monsters don't typically have the two-weapon fighting of two magical +3 swords, the STR bonuses to hit, etc. etc.

Right now, my super high level PCs are in the AC 12-15 range and monsters with similar HD but without proficiencies, magical weapons, etc. etc. have little-to-no chance of hitting the PCs. At least, not in any meaningful percentage of time.

Does anyone know what the Rules Cyclopedia rule was for this? Thinking about house-ruling it.

Hi Michael,

I ran ACKS to max level twice and haven't had this issue. I believe you when you say that you do. So I want to figure out where we are differing.

Here are some sample monsters from a high-level dungeon in my home campaign:

Sothgar the Death Knight: Mummy Fighter 14; Move 240'; AC 17; HD 14; HP 75; #AT 2 (permanently Hasted) two-handed sword -6+, Dmg 1d10+11, Save F14 (+2 on saves); S 18, I 13, W 13, D 16, C - Ch 14; Proficiencies: Combat Reflexes, Commander, Weapon Focus (swords), Fighting Style (two-handed fighting); Permanent Enchantments: Detect Invisible, Haste, Protection from Normal Missiles, Protection from Good, Resist Fire; Equipment: Plate Armor +3, Two-Handed Vorpal Sword, Cloak of Displacement

(He's a classed NPC who was transformed into a Mummy and retained his class powers.)

12-Head Regenerating Spydra: Move 120', AC 5, HD 12, hp 96, #AT 12, Dmg 1d10 + save v. Poison or Die, Save F12, loses 1 head per 8hp of damage, grows 2 new heads 1d4 rounds after losing a head (this is a crossbreed between a poisonous spider and a regenerating hydra)

Gorgan, Dire Orc Chieftain: Move 150', AC10, HD10+3, hp 67, #AT 1* warhammer -2+, Dmg 2d6+4, Save F10; carries war hammer +2, wears plate armor, ring of fire resistance, potion of speed, and potion of giant strength. He will imbibe the latter when confronting opponents, giving him a movement of 300', two attacks per round, and each hit does 4d6+4 damage.

Dire Trolls: Move 120', AC 8, HD9+9**, hp54, #AT 3 (claw / claw / bite) 0+, Dmg 1d10/1d10/3d6, Save F11, Regenerate 3hp / round

A few explanatory notes:

1. I absolutely assign magic items to intelligent high-level monsters: If magic items are in their treasure hoard, they are used!

2. I generally assign proficiencies where relevant to classed NPCs, at least where I think it will make a difference.

3. Weapon-armed intelligent monsters are allowed to take advantage of game rules; if they fight with two weapons, their attack throws go up by 1, if they fight with spears, they can charge for double damage.

4. For high level play, I made a whole set of "dire beastmen" that are berserkers (+2 to hit and immune to fear) with bonus HD and AC to use as "grunts", and created hideous crossbred monstrosities like the Spydra.

5. High-level casters can and will buff up their pets and minions. Inspire Courage and Bless offer +2 to hit and damage; that makes a big difference, especially at the margins (e.g. hitting on 17-20 versus hitting on a 20).

In actual play, the highest AC I've ever seen on one of my PCs was an AC of 19. Sothgar needed a 13+ to hit the PC. Most of the PCs ended the campaign in the 12-15 range, which would have been a 6 to 9+ for Sothgar, 10 to 13+ for Gorgan, and 12+ to 15+ for the trolls or spydra. All of which hit very hard and had multiple attacks.

Marcus, a 14th level fighter, had (as of session 93): plate armor +4, cloak of displacement, girdle of giant strength, gauntlets of ogre power, ring of regeneration, ring of water walking, +3 vorpal two-handed sword, and boots of speed. His AC (with DEX 15) was $(6+4+2+1)$ 13. He hit very, very hard of course; 2 attacks per round with his two-handed sword at -5+ / Dmg 2d10+8.

Farlaghn, a 10th level spellsword, had: plate armor +3, ring of protection +3, ring of fire resistance, sword +3 defender, sword +2 defender, wand of lightning bolts, wand of polymorph. His AC (with DEX 16 and using his swords for defense) was $(6+3+3+3+2+2)$ 19.

Per the above, I generally:

- Give ability score bonuses to important monsters. The default characteristics are - for monsters with "straight 10s" for their race.
- Give magic items to important monsters. The lich's pet hydra has a collar of protection +1. The orc chief fights with a battle axe +2. Etc

Crate of Weapons or Armor

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/crate-weapons-or-armor>

July 17, 2013

Tag: Q&A

CainGillespie wrote:

It's possible to get a crate of weapons or armor as treasure worth 225 gold and weighing 10 stone, which could be sold at a market. If a character were to break open the crate to outfit some soldiers, would it simply be full of a random assortment of armor and/or weapons up to the value and weight listed? Could a hoarder assemble a crate of weapons by scavenging battlefields until they had 225 gold and 10 stone worth of weaponry?

Cain:

1) I wouldn't do it randomly, no, I'd assume the crates were intended for military units or were the work of a particular smith.

2) Yes, if the players assemble a crate of weapons they can take it to market. If they are scavenging the weapons from the field of battle, be sure to check the rules on p.210 to reduce the value of the scavenged items.

Variant Magic Equipment

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/variant-magic-equipment>

September 15, 2013

Tag: Q&A

The Dark wrote:

Has anyone given thought to magic equipment (particularly weapons and armor) that, rather than granting a +X bonus, gives a character a proficiency? I'm thinking of things like Leather Armor of the Swashbuckler, that (when worn) gives the wearer the swashbuckling proficiency, or a Hammer of Dungeon Bashing that gets +4 to break doors, or specially etched Plate Armor of Intimidation, or a Shield of Skirmishing. I'm not sure if it would horribly unbalance things, but poking it with a stick, it seems like they would be interesting to the players, particularly if kept relatively rare (on par with +2 or +3 equipment). Thoughts? Problems I've overlooked?

Go for it. It will make your game better.

One of my regrets with ACKS is that I did not revisit the B/X magic items to create a whole new slate of magic items based on ACKS proficiencies and spells.

I mean...

Alembic of Alchemy

Boots of Acrobatics

Bow of Precise Shooting

Cloak of Swashbuckling

Ear-Horn of Eavesdropping

Gloves of the Burning Hands

Lens of Lip-Reading

Staff of Battle Magic

Swift Sword of Striking

The awesome is just waiting to be unleashed (in the Auran Empire Campaign Setting!!)

I'd allow the item to stack with the proficiency if the character has both. Given that most bonuses from proficiencies are limited to +1 or at most +2 it's unlikely to be overpowering relative to a standard "statted" item. If in default, allow a +4 bonus for a second rank of a non-combat skill.

In some cases it would even help the item "grow" with the character. For example, a Cloak of Swashbuckling would provide a +1 bonus to AC from level 1-6, +2 at 7-12, and +3 at 13 and 14. Is that better than a cloak of protection +1? Well, it doesn't improve saves and only works with leather armor. Etc.

Arrow of Slaying +3 (undead) vs. Vampire

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/arrow-slaying-3-undead-vs-vampire>

June 03, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Marasmus wrote:

Which of the specifics holds sway in the text? I know that under vampires, it specifies how they can be destroyed, but the slaying arrows say the hit creature is instantly killed.

I assume that if you shoot a vampire with an arrow of undead slaying, they are not killed, but transformed into their gaseous form and can reform in their nearest coffin 8 hours later. But maybe the slaying arrows are an important loophole.

I'd treat it as a stake to the heart. The vampire is paralyzed and powerless. Beheading it will finish it off.

Chapter 10: Secrets

Size of a Barony

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/size-barony>

April 07, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Irda Ranger wrote:

Shouldn't a Baron's realm in 6-mile hexes be marked as either "1/2" or "Less than 1"? I'm trying to build the starting realm for my ACKS campaign, and it only seems to work if I ignore the "Barony=1" value in the "Realms by Type:Realm Size(6 Mile Hex)" table.

How else can a March with 3-4 six-mile hexes have 4-6 Barons? That's not even possible, not to mention leaves nothing for the Marquis.

If the Baronial realm size was 1/2 a 6-mile hex, then a Marquis could have this 4-6 Barons and always have a hex left over for himself to tax. If Barons really get a full hex to themselves, each of the Lords above them need a much bigger realms (a March would be 6-8 (not 3-4), a County would be 30-52 (not 15-30), etc.).

Hi Irda! If carefully you do the math, Baronies will be less than 1 hex, yes. I rounded up on the table. The actual value is between 1/4 and 1/2 a hex depending on whether its a borderlands, wilderness, or civilized hex.

Your suggested house rules are very cool. I love it when sleek emergent properties develop!

Domain Level Trade Routes

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/domain-level-trade-routes>

April 19, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Brennal wrote:

I am trying to work out what happens in this scenario.

Four local Barons all have roads (wide/clear dirt track most likely) leading to the Marquis castle. The Marquis and his Barons are all in the borderlands and have small populations (no urban contingent) and as such the stronghold for each of them counts as a Class VI Market if I am understanding correctly.

I generated the trade demand modifiers for each realm, taking into account local conditions as per the chart on pg 234.

I came to the point of modifying the demand based on "Trade Routes" on pg. 233.

Now I know all the markets will "modify" their trade to match the needs of those that trade with them, normally the larger one will "pull/push" from the smaller ones.

In this case how would one trade between them all ..

Would they trade towards the Marquis Market, therefore one after another modifying themselves and the Marquis Market till all four were done.

Would they trade between themselves also? they could use the roads to pass through the Marquis personal realm to go to the other baronies?

Or is there a different way of doing this I am not quite seeing?

An example based on the above conditions would be very helpful :)

Thanks!

Hi Brennal! Let me see if I can give a simplified example that will address your questions.

March: Class VI. 320 families. Hides/furs -2, Grain -2, Spices +2, Silk +2.
Barony North: Class VI. 160 families. Hides/furs -1, Grain 0, Spices 0, Silk +1.
Barony East: Class VI. 160 families. Hides/furs +1, Grain +1, Spices -1, Silk -1.
Barony South: Class VI. 160 families. Hides/furs +2, Grain 0, Spices -2, Silk -2.
Barony West: Class VI. 160 families. Hides/furs 0, Grain +2, Spices +1, Silk 0.

Let's assume that the Baronies form a + sign or cross, with each Barony sitting at one point of the cross. The March sits in the middle of the + sign.

Let's assume that the March has a trade route with all 4. Barony North trades with West and East. Barony West trades with North and South. Barony South trades with West and East. Barony East trades with North and South. Very straightforward.

The rules state: "When a trade route connects two markets, the smaller market has all of its demand modifiers shifted by 2 points closer to the larger market's demand modifiers (or set equal to the larger market's demand modifiers if separated by less than 2 points). If the two markets connected by the trade route are of equal size, each shifts each of its demand modifiers by 1 point closer to the other market's demand modifiers. When shifting demand modifiers for a region, start with the largest market and work outward to its direct trade routes, and then from there to the next markets, and so on."

So, we are going to start with the March, because it's the largest Market (320 families). Since it's the same market class as the regions its trading with (Class VI), it and its trading partners each shift 1 point towards each other.

For March/North trade route: March gets +1 to Hides/furs, +1 to Grain, -1 to Spices, -1 to Silk. North gets -1 to Hides/furs, -1 to Grain, +1 to Spices, +1 to Silk.

For March/East: March gets +1 to Hides/furs, +1 to Grain, -1 to Spices, -1 to Silk. East gets -1 to Hides/furs, -1 to Grain, +1 to Spices, +1 to Silk.

For March/South: March gets +1 to Hides/furs, +1 to Grain, -1 to Spices, -1 to Silk. South gets -1 to Hides/furs, -1 to Grain, +1 to Spices, +1 to Silk.

For March/West, March gets +1 to Hides/furs, +1 to Grain, -1 to Spices, -1 to Silk. South gets -1 to Hides/furs, -1 to Grain, +1 to Spices, +1 to Silk.

Therefore, after accounting for the influence of March's trade routes, these are the new modifiers:

March: Class VI. 320 families. Hides/furs +2, Grain +2, Spices -2, Silk -2.
Barony North: Class VI. 160 families. Hides/furs -2, Grain -1, Spices +1, Silk +2.
Barony East: Class VI. 160 families. Hides/furs 0, Grain 0, Spices 0, Silk 0.
Barony South: Class VI. 160 families. Hides/furs +1, Grain -1, Spices -1, Silk -1.
Barony West: Class VI. 160 families. Hides/furs -1, Grain +1, Spices +2, Silk +1.

Now, what ends up making this a fairly complex exercise is because all of the markets are exactly the same size, so the trade routes are done simultaneously. That's a somewhat artificial situation, because usually the trade routes will be between at least somewhat differently sized towns, and will have been set up over time.

As an alternative, imagine that the starting conditions are as follows:

1. March: Class VI. 320 families. Hides/furs -2, Grain -2, Spices +2, Silk +2.
2. Barony North: Class VI. 170 families. Hides/furs -1, Grain 0, Spices 0, Silk +1.
3. Barony East: Class VI. 165 families. Hides/furs +1, Grain +1, Spices -1, Silk -1.
4. Barony South: Class VI. 160 families. Hides/furs +2, Grain 0, Spices -2, Silk -2.
5. Barony West: Class VI. 155 families. Hides/furs 0, Grain +2, Spices +1, Silk 0.

Now the domains are no longer the same size. Now, we'd proceed step by step as follows.

First Trade Route: March to Barony North. Each moves 1 point closer to the other.

1. March becomes: Hides/furs -1, Grain -1, Spices +1, Silk +1
2. Barony North: Hides/furs -2, Grain -1, Spices +1, Silk +2.

Second Trade Route: March to Barony East. Each moves 1 point closer to the other. March moves from its *new* position (Hides/furs -1, Grain -1, Spices +1, Silk +1)

1. March becomes: Hides/furs 0, Grain 0, Spices 0, Silk 0.
2. Barony East becomes: Hides/furs 0, Grain 0, Spices 0, Silk 0.

Third Trade Route: March to Barony South. Each moves 1 point closer to the other. March moves from its *new* position (Hides/furs 0, Grain 0, Spices 0, Silk 0.)

1. March becomes Hides/furs +1, Grain 0, Spices -1, Silk -1.
2. Barony South becomes Hides/furs +1, Grain 0, Spices -1, Silk -1.

Fourth Trade Route: March to Barony West. Each moves 1 point closer to the other. March moves from its *new* position (Hides/furs +1, Grain 0, Spices -1, Silk -1)

1. March becomes Hides/furs 0, Grain +1, Spices 0, Silk 0
2. Barony West becomes Hides/furs +1, Grain +1, Spices 0, Silk -1.

So you can see that the order in which you decide to set up the trade routes can have substantial impact.

Ultimately the point of the trade routes rules is to eliminate gross opportunities for arbitrage by tending to have nearby settlements have similar trade modifiers.

Domains Rules Questions + New World Campaign Suggestions

<http://autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/domains-rules-questions-new-world-campaign-suggestions>

April 26, 2012

Tag: Q&A

creatorlars wrote:

These are a very simple questions but I want to make sure I have this right. Let me know if these statements are correct:

- 1) I am building a realm which is 1 County includes 3 Marches, each of which contains 4 Baronies (12 total Baronies in the realm.) Including personal domains for the Count and 3 Marquis', the number of actual domains is 16.*
- 2) The political boundaries of a realm may be well beyond its number of actual controlled hexes.*
- 3) The population density numbers assume average density of controlled hexes only.*
- 4) The above mentioned county would have 1 Village as its largest settlement and everything else would be tiny hamlets of less than 75 families each. However, each domain must maintain its own stronghold/garrison (making there 16 total strongholds in the county -- the same as the number of domains.)*

Lastly, I am working on a campaign setting that involves the colonization of a new world. The initial colonies (the above mentioned county) is well established enough to where I feel comfortable using the base ACKS demographics and rules -- however, I am interested in your suggestions on modeling things such as small settlements and colonies in this sense. Or maybe even, some conjecturing on how being separated by an ocean from the mainland would effect standard ACKS rules for markets and domains or otherwise.

The ACKS model works well for this sandbox campaign I believe, because there are already rules in place for establishing colonies, securing hexes, etc. And I expect the adventurers will begin to do that, after launching expeditions into the new land to explore and gain treasure.

Hello! All of your points 1 to 4 are correct. Definitely on track.

With regard to trade with the "new world," what I'd recommend is that you roll up the demand modifiers for the "new world" separate from the "old world," and *not* apply any trade routes between them. This will result in large differentials in the demand modifiers between the two regions.

Extracting Poison and Alchemy

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/extracting-poison-and-alchemy>

May 11, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

MichaelPfaff wrote:

When extracting poisons from plants, does the target number reduce by 4 for each additional slot of Alchemy you have?

For example, the normal target number is 14+. If I have 3 slots of Alchemy, would that reduce to 6+?

I think it does, but I just want to be sure.

In general, an additional rank in the proficiency reduces proficiency rolls required by 4.

Demand Modifiers for Underground Cities *Spoiler Alert*

<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/demand-modifiers-underground-cities-spoiler-alert>

June 13, 2012

Tag: Q&A

James C. Bennett wrote:

I'm starting my campaign with B4 The Lost City, and am building the underground city of the Cynidiceans as a market. I was wondering if you had any advice on what, if any, climate modifiers to use.

I'd go with:

2,0001+ years; No Water Source; Desert; Hills

That would yield, e.g.:

Grains $+3 + 1 + 0 = +4$

Glassware: $-1 + -1/2 + -1/2 = -2$

Monster Parts: $+1 + -1/2 + 0 = -1/2$

Spices: $+1 + 0 + 1/2 = 1\ 1/2$

And so on

I picked desert because that was the climate above.

If you want to do an "underdark" campaign, you'd probably have to create a set of domain modifiers specifically for the underdark. Unfortunately, there have been no historical underdarks from which I can draw examples of what their trading patterns might be. Probably what you could do (for gameplay's sake) is figure out the demand modifiers of the nearby regions on the surface, and then make them dramatically different. That way the underdark to surface trade routes will be highly profitable and the exchange of goods will be exotic.

XP/GP Amounts in a Dungeon

<http://autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/xpgp-amounts-dungeon>

July 02, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Thomas Weigel wrote:

I mapped a L1 Dungeon of 63 rooms, using the random tables and then laying it out as made best sense. I got 40,063 XP in monsters and 88,422 GP in treasure. I intend to go through and stuff additional treasure in, of course.

But I was curious: how did it end up so far off?

One possibility: Do the treasure tables count the magic items toward their total value? I spot checked two, and they added up without the magic items. So I'm inclined to think "no." That also makes sense, because magic items usually aren't a source of treasure-based XP.

Another possibility: Were the champions, sub-chiefs, chiefs, and fighting non-combatants ignored? That seemed more possible, especially since the fighting non-combatants often represent almost half the fighting force of a village or lair, and two huge sections of my dungeon are an orc village and a lizardmen village.

A third possibility: The "special" goods are undervalued. But again, I spot-checked the Gold table, and it actually comes out to an average of 1,035.2 gold per 1,000 gold. So it's probably not that.

Lastly: It could be that the treasure tables are swingier than they look. Really, really swingier. Enough so that even 63 rooms isn't enough for results to start to approach the average. Unfortunately, short of coding an entire dungeon generator, I don't have a way to test that one.

More lastly than that: Something that hasn't occurred to me. Maybe I did something wrong? Can anyone think of something I might have done to arrive at almost exactly half the treasure I would have expected to have?

The formula we used to develop the treasure types are esoteric and fill up many many pages worth of spreadsheets. But, more-or-less, the answer to your question is that "it's very swingy." In most cases, you will want to do a second pass to correct the treasure allocation in the dungeon. That's why we provide specific guidelines on how to do so. We could have made the treasure types less swingy, but then you've boxed the GM into a corner for those moments when he wants rich orcs, or poor dragons.

I know some GMs who do play with "the dice are always right" mentality, but I personally prefer a less gonzo game, so I tend to adjust treasure allocations by hand to match up to my desired ratios.

Settled Terrain

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/settled-terrain>

July 30, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Ludanto wrote:

What is "Settled Terrain"? You check for wilderness encounters less often and have encounters less frequently in "settled terrain" (p. 244), but it's not clear to me what qualifies. My first thought was cities and towns and villages, but "City" is its own category, and since you don't see back-to-back hexes of towns and villages, checking once per day and once per hex would be the same either way.

Does "settled" here mean "civilized" (p. 125), or maybe "part of a domain"? Come to think of it, if you're in a civilized or borderlands domain, are you still checking for "wilderness" encounters?

Anyway, thank you.

Settled terrain is a hex within an adequately-garrisoned domain. (Note that garrisoning a domain costs more in borderlands and wilderness).

Wilderness Encounter: Veteran

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/wilderness-encounter-veteran>

August 02, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

Ludanto wrote:

On page 245, Wilderness Encounters: Men, Inhabited/6 = "Veteran".

It feels like it ought to be in there with "Merchant" and "Buccaneer" and "Berserker", but it's not.

So, what's a "Veteran"?

The inclusion of Bandit and Veteran was definitely legacy code.

The intent of the encounter is that your party runs into a group of low-level thieves (Bandits) and low-level fighters (Veterans), but you'd have no way of knowing this unless you owned a copy of the Moldvay Basic set, which lists Bandits and Veterans as monster types.

For ACKS purposes:

Bandits - Roll an NPC encounter; average level 1; all NPCs are Thieves

Veterans - Roll an NPC encounter; average level 1; all NPCs are Fighters

Wilderness Encounter: Trader

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/wilderness-encounter-trader>

August 07, 2012

Tag: **Q&A**

Rodriguez wrote:

Various Tables include a "Trader", whats the difference compared to a "Merchant"?

Treat it as an encounter with NPC Venturers (from the Player's Companion).

Hex Size

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/hex-size>

August 09, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Agamon wrote:

Hey, I'm working on a hexcrawl setting for the game (love it, btw), and I want to use Hexographer and Welsh Piper's sub-hex templates. The problem is, WP assumes a 5-mile sub-hex with 25-mile regional hexes. It's easy to change the small hexes to 6-mile, but that makes the regional hexes 30-mile.

I assume the 6-mile sub-hex size is more important than the 24-mile regional hex size? Would it run havoc with the math too much to assume a 6/30 sizing instead of 6/24? (5/25 would pretty much keep the upper scale true, but that seems less important, I think)

Or will changing it all from 6/24 be a bad idea?

The main effect of changing the hex size is that you change the amount of territory that a domain of a particular hex size controls.

Here are the sizes in square miles of the various hexes:

5 mile hex: area of 22 square miles

6 mile hex: area of 31 square miles

24 mile hex: area of 500 square miles

30 mile hex: area of 775 square miles

First Implication: A wilderness domain cannot exceed 4 families per square mile. A borderlands domain cannot exceed 8 families per square mile. And a civilized domain cannot exceed 25 families per square mile. So with 5 mile hexes you will have maximum families/hex of 88, 176, and 550 respectively.

Second Implication: A domain's maximum size is one 24 mile hex. Large domains must be divided and assigned to vassals to create realms. Therefore, if you increase the size of the hex from 24 miles to 30 miles, you are increasing the maximum size of domains from 12,500 families to 18,750 families, which is an increase in the direct power of a lord of about 50%.

Wilderness Encounter - Dragon

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/wilderness-encounter-dragon>

August 13, 2012

Tag: Q&A

jedavis wrote:

With the new lairs per hex suggestion, I've begun stocking the hexes around the PCs' new domain with monster lairs, and I keep rolling Dragon, followed by Dragon on the dragons subtable. I'm curious what the best way to determine the HD of such randomly generated laired dragons is; I've been using 1d20, rounding age up to the next highest category, but am curious what the Autarchs use in this situation. The Dragon monster entry is unhelpful in this regard, providing not even the barest suggestions :(*

I would recommend using 2d4:

- 2 - Spawn
- 3 - V. Young
- 4 - Young
- 5 - Juvenile
- 6 - Adult
- 7 - Mature Adult
- 8 - Old

If you roll an 8, roll 1d6-3. On a 1, the dragon is Very Old, on a 2 Ancient, and on a 3 Venerable.

That should give a breakdown of:

6.25%	Spawn
13%	V Young
18.75%	Young
25%	Juvenile
18.75%	Adult
13%	Mature
3.125%	Old
1%	Very Old
1%	Ancient
1%	Venerable

Nobility, Advisors, and High-Level Characters

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/nobility-advisors-and-high-level-characters>

September 19, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Asaris wrote:

I've been rolling up my campaign setting for a while now, and decided I should work up the high-level characters in the Principality of Morachi. It's been interesting to think about the relationships between the characters in light of their levels. For example, the mayor of Solove (level 5) might have some legal authority over the town, but it's the resident mage (level 10) who really pulls the strings. In contrast, while the Patriarch (Cleric 10), residing in Prion has more pull than the Lord Mayor (Fighter 9), there is not nearly the difference in power.

I've noticed, as I've created these high-level people, is that it seems most of them are either lords of a domain, or advisors to those lords. Does that make sense to you guys, that most of the powerful folks would either have their own domain or be working directly with someone who does? Or should their be more ronin wandering around?

Also, given the maximum boss levels of the urban centers, there aren't a lot of high-level thieves. Am I thinking about something differently here? I certainly don't mind departing from the book where I decide I want to, but I'd like to know when I'm doing it so I can try to have a good reason.

ACKS assumes that the most powerful folks either have their own domain or are working directly with someone who does. "Ronin" would be characters at a lower tier, for the most part.

There won't be a lot of high level thieves outside of major urban centers, which is where the vast majority of the profits will be. Keep in mind that even a mid-level thief can run a local syndicate, however, if he's the vassal of a higher-level thief.

Where Have All the Hamlets Gone?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/where-have-all-hamlets-gone>

November 23, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tom Hudson wrote:

So the "10% urban population; Hamlet is an urban settlement of up to 74 families (390 people)" on page 231 of the rules doesn't quite sit right with me.

It feels to me as if scattered farmsteads is more a American pioneer trope than a Medieval Europe or Antiquity pattern, and that most of the population ought to be in hamlets. What I've skimmed of scholarly articles on the net suggests that ACKS is perhaps appropriate for some areas in antiquity and that my reflex is more Medieval - or mid-/late-Roman (villas?).

So, what caused Autarch to construct the rules the way you did?

<http://www.le.ac.uk/users/grj1/asl.html>:

Settlement patterns as well as village plans in England fall into two great categories: scattered farms and homesteads in upland and woodland Britain, nucleated villages across a swathe of central England. The chronology of nucleated villages is much debated and not yet clear. Yet there is strong evidence to support the view that nucleation occurred in the tenth century or perhaps the ninth, and was a development parallel to the growth of towns.

(The following paragraphs of the article are a really interesting discussion.)

<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/archaeology/fieldwork/brodsworth>

How and why the dispersed settlement pattern of the Roman period changes to one of nucleated villages by the 9th or 10th century is poorly understood in the North Midlands and southern Yorkshire and yet is fundamental to understanding the character of the landscape we see today. There are several deserted and shrunken medieval villages in the study area and we will continue with our investigations of some of these. Another focus of the project is the development of the formal, designed landscapes around the many country houses in the area (including Brodsworth, Hickleton, and Hooton Pagnell Halls). The transition from medieval village to post-medieval country house estate is not understood and here we have an excellent opportunity to explore the origins and impacts of this process.

http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Villa_to_village.html?id=HCwMAQAAMAAJ

In Villa to Village Riccardo Francovich and Richard Hodges challenge the historical view that hilltop villages in Italy were first founded in the tenth century. Drawing upon evidence from recent excavations, the authors show that the making of the medieval village lie earlier, in the demise of the Roman villa in late antiquity.

<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/13389/11.07.10.html?sequence=1>
...the patterns of village morphology and the diversity of material culture characteristic of the half millennium until the Renaissance are highly variegated.

This makes me want to read <http://www.boydellandbrewer.com/store/viewItem.asp?idProduct=13419> and <http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/product/9780199602353.do#.UK9U2odah9Y> and <http://oxrep.classics.ox.ac.uk/oxrep/index.php?t=17&pg=94> and ... What a horrible, horrible hobby this is.

Hi guys! This is a great question, but one with a complex answer.

Historical Settlement Patterns: You are correct that the default setting for ACKS is closer to Late Antiquity rather than English Middle Ages. Late Antiquity had a more dispersed settlement pattern.

(Why Late Antiquity? It allows us to have 5 important tropes: (1) an age of warring states with adventurers seizing power, (2) recognizably feudal power structures (e.g. Roman manorialism, Byzantine themes, and barbarian warrior clans), (3) pagan religion, (4) coin-based economics, and (5) a large network of trade, in a semi-plausible historical setting. None of the other time periods commonly used for fantasy RPGs have all 5 tropes. Classical Antiquity doesn't have 1-2, the Middle Ages doesn't have 3-5, and the Renaissance doesn't have 2 or 3.)

Therefore, if you want to simulate Middle Ages England, definitely clump your homesteads together to form little clusters, rather than assume they are sprinkled about as independent homesteads (Although, leaving aside historicity, there is much to be said for sprinkling your region with isolated homesteads from an adventuring-utility perspective. D&D has much in common with a "Fantasy Western".)

Game Mechanics of Hamlets: In game terms, the difference between "hamlet" and "set of homesteads" is just that a hamlet has a Class VI market, equipment for purchase, and/or specialists, while a set of homesteads, even if clumped close together, will not.

At this point, of course, one must note that the Village, Town, and City table on p.134 of ACKS remarks that a Class VI market only exists at the stronghold of a hamlet. Perusing the settlement patterns implied by the game, you'll note that most hamlets won't have a stronghold, and as such hamlets do not materially differ from homesteads. So what gives?

The answer requires digging back to the earliest playtest drafts of ACKS. Up until just before publish, ACKS assumed an entire layer of domains below the baronial level (patrician/knight types), which were sprinkled about at a ratio of 4-6 per barony. These domains each had a small "Villa/Manor House" stronghold and more or less corresponded to the presence of hamlets. In playtesting, though, I found that tracking these less-than-1-hex sized domains was awful and time-consuming, so I ultimately abstracted the game at one level above them.

Settlement Sizes

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/settlement-sizes>

February 26, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Tom Hudson wrote:

I got in a discussion on Talysman's blog (<http://9and30kingdoms.blogspot.co.uk/2013/02/mapping-towns.html> and previous) about settlement sizes, and said I'd follow up here.

Where do the sizes of settlements in ACKS come from? I assume there must be an economic model - can you summarize? Give pointers to research sources for the curious?

The context originally was in laying out small-scale maps of settlements + nearby features; Talysman was suggesting that there were a half-dozen buildings in a hamlet, or maybe 30-40 in a village. This conflicts pretty strongly with ACKS, where I can't see a small village having fewer than 50 buildings, and 75-100 more likely (since there are 75-99 families, and so 375-495 people, right?).

Your numbers are in line with S. John Ross' famous demographics site (<http://www222.pair.com/sjohn/blueroom/demog.htm>), but there aren't exactly footnotes there. I'll have to add some of his references to my wishlist...

The sizes of settlements at the low end are relatively arbitrary. There is often very good documentation about the population of famous cities, such as Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Athens, or Sparta, and so one can safely say that such cities are rare and require large realms. But with regard to, e.g., the average size of a village in Attica, there's much less information, and historians often disagree sharply. Even the sizes of well-documented sites like Jerusalem can trigger major disputes.

An earlier version of ACKS used a very complex model to determine the maximum size of a city based on the land value, number of peasants in the domains, number of trade routes, and so on, but it proved way too complex for a tabletop game. And no matter what I did, I couldn't "account" for all settlement patterns. It's just hard to model something like Tyre (island city). I abandoned it in favor of just allowing settlements to grow indefinitely provided infrastructure gp was spent.

Slaves in the Domain

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/slaves-domain>

March 18, 2013

Tag: Q&A

brennall wrote:

Having read the info on slaves on the forums here: -

<http://www.autarch.co/forum/slaves-0>

I noted the ongoing cost of labour slaves to be 2gp/month each: -

"They cost 2gp each per month and have morale scores of -4."

In addition they can replace peasant families: -

"When used on a domain, treat every 5 slave laborers as equivalent to one peasant family for all purposes."

*Given the costs per month of 5 slaves * 2gp = 10gp/month for a peasant family equivalent. (We can assume the up front purchase cost is covered separately)*

A Peasant family in a 6 land revenue domain produces 6gp in land revenue, 4gp in services, taxes 2gp. Therefore worth 12gp per month to their lord.

A Slave "family" for want of a better word produces 6gp in land revenue, I assume none in services (they are basic labour) or taxes.

If they produce 6gp per month .. but cost 10gp .. they are not the cheap labor they are supposed to be!

I assume I misread something ... could one of you nice Autarch gentlemen please enlighten me?

I fear that you are making this more complex than you ought to, and thus confusing yourself!

There's no need to calculate the cost of upkeep of the slaves, and then secondarily calculating their land value production, discounting taxes, and so on. When used on a domain, you simply treat every 5 slave laborers as equivalent to one peasant family for all purposes.

The rules will make more sense if you read them as follows:

Slaves as Individuals: Individually, slave laborers can be used for any labor-related tasks. They cost 2gp each per month in upkeep and have morale scores of -4.

Slaves on a Domain: When used on a domain, treat every 5 slave laborers as equivalent to one peasant family for all purposes. If a domain's population consists of 25% or more slave laborers, its domain morale is decreased by 1. If a domain's population consists of 50% or more slave laborers, its domain morale is decreased by 2. If the domain is 100% slave labor, domain morale is decreased by 4.

The two rules are mutually exclusive. Thus, if Marcus, the Adventurer, buys a slave it costs him 40gp. He then pays 2gp per month for upkeep. The slave has -4 morale. The player and Judge then role-play at the individual level what tasks the slave does that make it worthwhile. If King Marcus has 1,000 slaves, they produce as if they were 200 peasant families. King Marcus isn't worrying about paying "upkeep" on these slaves. Their upkeep comes out of whatever's left over after he's extracted his wealth from them.

Yes, there is an abstraction involved in that slaves aren't really paying "taxes", but just pretend you're a libertarian and believe that taxation is slavery. :)

Level 14 NPC Parties?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/level-14-npc-parties>

April 11, 2013

Tag: Q&A

DrSkull wrote:

I don't get how there are 1d4+3 level 14 NPC's in a party encountered in a level 6 dungeon, but there should only be 3 level 14 guys in a whole empire. Am I missing something?

That's a great question.

When you have a party of 14th level NPCs encountered on the 6th level of the dungeon, you should use 1 14th level NPC and a mix of lower levels surrounding and assisting the 14th level NPC.

On ACKS p.248 we explain that you can replace an PC with 2 of the same class two levels lower. This can scale repeatedly.

So for example let's say the encounter is 5 14th level NPCs. In practice you might make the encounter:

1 14th level NPC

4 12th level NPCs

8 10th level NPCs

Of course, you can also say "screw the demographics" and just have a party of 14th level NPCs down there. The demographics are merely averages over time and space. But that doesn't mean some times and places won't be outliers. And certainly the 6th level of a mega-dungeon is usually pretty mythic or gonzo.

Wetlands?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/wetlands>

March 27, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

brennall wrote:

Are there any Demand modifiers for wetlands like Swamp or Marsh?

I didn't include the various types of wetland because I didn't think there'd be many settlements in them. Try the following.

There are four basic types of wetlands: swamps, marshes, bogs, and fens.

1) Swamps are wet forests. Apply the DM for Plains combined with either Lake Shore or Riverbank (whichever is closer to the swamp) and either Rainforest, Deciduous Forest, or Taiga (depending on latitude).

2) Marshes are wet grasslands. Apply the DM for Plains combined with either Lake Shore or Riverbank and either Steppe, Grasslands, or Tundra.

3) Fens and bogs are (more or less) wet shrublands. Apply the DM for Plains combined with either Lake Shore or Riverbank and either Savanna, Scrub, or Tundra.

That should produce "good enough" results.

Lichdom and Spellcasting

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/lichdom-and-spellcasting>

April 23, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Nerdnumber1 wrote:

From what I've read it seems that spellcasting ability and progression does not necessarily hold over when one becomes undead. Is this true? If so, how many "special abilities" would spell-casting count as for purposes of creating undead or crossbreeds?

I want to figure out how to make a lich. While many wizards look to lichdom as a way to extend their existence with the purpose of increasing their own magical knowledge and power, but it seems like becoming an undead might be a magical dead end (unless you're Zaharan). How would you go about making a lich?

Hi Nerdnumber1!

Divine spellcasting counts as one special ability (*) and arcane spellcasting counts as two special abilities (**).

This is discussed in "Additional Rules for Judges" under "Transformations":

A character transformed into undead gains all the abilities associated with his new monstrous form, including forms of movement and speeds, natural armor, natural attacks, extraordinary abilities, and the like. If the undead's Hit Dice are below the character's former class level, its Hit Dice should be increased to the character's former class level. A character transformed into an undead may increase in HD through adventuring. It requires 3,000xp plus 500xp per special ability (*) for a 1 HD monster to advance to 2 HD. The amount of XP required doubles with each HD (round values greater than 20,000xp to the nearest 1,000).

At the Judge's discretion, spellcasters transformed into intelligent undead may be able to retain their spellcasting abilities. If so, divine spellcasting counts as one special ability (*) and arcane spellcasting counts as two special abilities (**). As his Hit Dice increase, the transformed character's spellcasting abilities will increase based on his prior class's progression, subject to the class's maximum level.

Nerdnumber1 then wrote:

Yeah, I saw that just recently after posting. Now as for cost and such. Does the spell-casting ability count just for purposes of XP or also for creation cost (and, more importantly, the cap on special abilities)? Put another way, if one turned a non-spellcaster into an intelligent undead (of a type that probably should retain casting like a vampire or lich) and an arcane spellcaster into the same exact type of intelligent undead, would the spellcaster cost more because he keeps his spellcasting, even though the process was, in theory, identical? Does the necromancer need to go through extra steps to ensure that the subject retains his or her casting?

*Furthermore, what would you rate abilities like a phylactery (allowing automatic, if delayed, resurrection), undead abilities, etc. (maybe paralysis or fear aura) in terms of "special abilities"? Something like a lich seems to be in danger of hitting ability cap quickly with ** for arcane casting.*

Lastly, how do you set the turning roll for a custom undead? Is it HD, special abilities, xp, something else?

"Does the spell-casting ability count just for purposes of XP or also for creation cost (and, more importantly, the cap on special abilities)? Put another way, if one turned a non-spellcaster into an intelligent undead (of a type that probably should retain casting like a vampire or lich) and an arcane spellcaster into the same exact type of intelligent undead, would the spellcaster cost more because he keeps his spellcasting, even though the process was, in theory, identical? Does the necromancer need to go through extra steps to ensure that the subject retains his or her casting?"

APM: I fear that the rules are vaguely written here, and thus susceptible to many interpretations. My intended result (which can hardly be deduced from the rules) is that the necromancer must pay the additional cost and time for any special abilities granted due to the ability to cast spells being retained, but that this special ability cost does *not* count against the maximum number of special abilities that a necromancer may imbue.

EXAMPLE: Sebek would like to transform his minion Thaddeus, a 9th level mage, into an undead creature. Sebek is 14th level and has INT 18 (+3), so he can transform Thaddeus into an undead of up to 14 HD with up to ****. He opts to transform Thaddeus into a Vampire (9HD****).

It will normally cost $(2000\text{gp} \times 9) + (5000\text{gp} \times 4)$ 38,000gp and 38 days to transform Thaddeus into a vampire. The target value for Sebek's magic research throw is increased by 7.

However, Sebek feels that Thaddeus' spellcasting abilities are too useful to give up, so he takes the extra steps necessary to ensure these will be retained. These count as 2 extras special abilities. Therefore it costs $(2000\text{gp} \times 9) + (5000\text{gp} \times 6)$ 48,000gp and 48 days to transform Thaddeus. The target value is increased by 9.

"Furthermore, what would you rate abilities like a phylactery (allowing automatic, if delayed, resurrection), undead abilities, etc. (maybe paralysis or fear aura) in terms of "special abilities"? Something like a lich seems to be in danger of hitting ability cap quickly with ** for arcane casting."

APM: I would assign a lich between *** and **** special abilities, depending on which variant you are adapting (is its paralysis permanent, for instance?) A phylactery is a * special ability. In general, the more powers a creature has, the less any one power is going to increase it by an *. For example, if a creature can both "control winds" and "telekinesis" this is not twice as helpful as just being able to do one or the other. The ability to both "lightning bolt" and "flame strike" is definitely not twice as good, etc. A Venerable Dragon which can cast arcane spells is a ***** creature.

"Lastly, how do you set the turning roll for a custom undead? Is it HD, special abilities, xp, something else?"

APM: As a rule of thumb, start with its HD. Add 1HD if intelligent. Subtract 1HD if incorporeal. Add 1HD if it's "hard to turn" or subtract 1HD if it's "easy to turn". (Judge's choice). Compare the result to the following table:

Modified HD - Undead Turned As

1HD - Skeleton

2HD - Zombie

3HD - Ghoul

4HD - Wight

5HD - Wraith

6HD - Mummy

7HD - Spectre

8HD - Vampire

9HD - Infernal

EXAMPLE: A Zombie has 2HD. 2HD monsters are turned as Zombies.

EXAMPLE: A Ghoul has 2HD. It's intelligent (+1HD). It's effectively a 3HD monster. 3HD monsters are turned as Ghouls.

EXAMPLE: A Wight has 3HD. It's intelligent (+1HD) so it's a 4HD monster. 4HD monsters are turned as Wights.

EXAMPLE: A Mummy has 5HD. It's intelligent (+1HD) so it's a 6HD monster. 6HD monsters are turned as Mummies.

EXAMPLE: A Spectre has 7HD. It's intelligent (+1HD) but it's incorporeal (-1HD), so it's at 7HD. 7HD monsters are turned as Spectres.

EXAMPLE: A Wraith has 4HD. It's intelligent (+1HD), it's incorporeal (-1HD), but it's "hard to run" (+1HD) so it's at 5HD.

Monster Transformation Questions

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/monster-transformation-questions>

May 01, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Nerdnumber1 wrote:

My Lichdom thread got me thinking about new questions about character transformations and advancement:

1) What happens with armor/weapon/fighting styles? My intuition says that the character can use any weapons/armor he used before transformation as well as any new natural attacks, but doesn't gain any extra equipment proficiency. However, this is not 100% clear and since monster attack progression is equated somewhat to fighter 3 in custom class construction, I'm not sure (I assume they don't automatically get the damage bonus). Furthermore, the character is supposed to lose all class abilities (iirc), so weapons/armor skills might qualify.

2) What happens to class/general proficiencies? It would seem odd for a mage to become worse at necromancy upon becoming a lich because he "forgot" Black Lore of Zahar.

3) Does a transformed character learn new proficiencies? I would think that class proficiencies would be a no since they lost their class, but maybe general proficiencies still work.

4) What kind of guidelines are there to setting a new custom creature's ac or natural armor? What, save the judge's wrath and common decency, prevent my lich from having enchanted bones the strength of plate armor? Also, how does natural armor and physical armor stack, if at all?

Some of the ambiguity you are seeing is because monsters were not *actually* built using the Custom Class creation system. Instead, the transformation rules are more-or-less an emulator to let you convert between the two.

In another thread, I posted an example for orcs and bugbears of how you can create monsters that function exactly like Player Companion classes while also being 100% compatible with the transformation rules and the monster listings. I have since begun working on some expanded rules for monsters that will be published in the Lairs & Encounters supplement. For the time being, here are some responses extracted from this future effort:

1) What happens with armor/weapon/fighting styles? My intuition says that the character can use any weapons/armor he used before transformation as well as any new natural attacks, but doesn't gain any extra equipment proficiency. However, this is not 100% clear and since monster attack progression is equated somewhat to fighter 3 in custom class construction, I'm not sure (I assume they don't automatically get the damage bonus). Furthermore, the character is supposed to lose all class abilities (iirc), so weapons/armor skills might qualify.

APM: If the character's new form is substantially similar to his old form (e.g. a man into an orc), then he would retain the weapon, armor, and fighting styles he already knew how to use. If the character's new form is substantially different (e.g. a man into a harpy), he would likely lose his existing training, as his new body would be so different. If he wishes to retain it, and it was anatomically viable, the Judge might allow it but apply an * to his XP curve.

2) What happens to class/general proficiencies? It would seem odd for a mage to become worse at necromancy upon becoming a lich because he "forgot" Black Lore of Zahar.

APM: If the character's new form is such that his mind is intact, he should retain his proficiencies. If his new form does not give him the means to carry out certain tasks, he may not be able to use the proficiencies, though he wouldn't forget them. (For example, a hydra-man might not be able to pick locks with his huge claws).

3) Does a transformed character learn new proficiencies? I would think that class proficiencies would be a no since they lost their class, but maybe general proficiencies still work.

APM: A monster with an Intelligence bonus will gain additional general proficiencies equal to this bonus. (This is unlikely to apply if the character's INT didn't change). When a monster acquires more HD than normal for its species, it earns additional class and general proficiencies; treat each HD gained as a class level gained of fighter. A monster also gains an additional general proficiency when it reaches the middle aged, old, and ancient age categories for its species. The Judge should determine what the monster's class proficiencies are, and what its age categories are.

Native born monsters will possess the Monster proficiency (see below), but most transformed monsters will not.

Monster: The monster is well-equipped for life as a creature of its kind. The specific tasks which are covered by this proficiency are determined by the type of creature, but generally will include knowing how to find food, secure shelter, easily open stuck dungeon doors, etc. This is the equivalent of the Adventuring proficiency for monsters.

4) What kind of guidelines are there to setting a new custom creature's ac or natural armor? What, save the judge's wrath and common decency, prevent my lich from having enchanted bones the strength of plate armor? Also, how does natural armor and physical armor stack, if at all?

Natural and physical armor stack, provided that the physical armor can be fit over the natural armor. If the result is an ungodly number, you might consider a less-high AC combined with some form of damage reduction (such as the mummy enjoys). That is definitely up to the Judge's discretion.

Nerdnumber1 then wrote:

I have a few follow-ups:

3) *Does a transformed character learn new proficiencies? I would think that class proficiencies would be a no since they lost their class, but maybe general proficiencies still work.*

APM: A monster with an Intelligence bonus will gain additional general proficiencies equal to this bonus. (This is unlikely to apply if the character's INT didn't change). When a monster acquires more HD than normal for its species, it earns additional class and general proficiencies; treat each HD gained as a class level gained of fighter. A monster also gains an additional general proficiency when it reaches the middle aged, old, and ancient age categories for its species. The Judge should determine what the monster's class proficiencies are, and what its age categories are.

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>>NN1 follow-Up 3a: There are existing guidelines as to the number of proficiencies that should make up a custom class's class proficiency list. About how many proficiencies should make up a monster's proficiency list?

4) What kind of guidelines are there to setting a new custom creature's ac or natural armor? What, save the judge's wrath and common decency, prevent my lich from having enchanted bones the strength of plate armor? Also, how does natural armor and physical armor stack, if at all?

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>>NN1 follow-up 4a: I am still looking for rough guidelines for natural armor values (also speed). Should natural armor and base speed affect each other?

>>NN1 follow-up 4b: How does speed reduction based on encumbrance work with creatures with differing base speeds and sizes. Is there an existing metric for these calculations?

>>NN1 follow-Up 3a: There are existing guidelines as to the number of proficiencies that should make up a custom class's class proficiency list. About how many proficiencies should make up a monster's proficiency list?

The same as a custom class.

>>NN1 follow-up 4a: I am still looking for rough guidelines for natural armor values (also speed). Should natural armor and base speed affect each other?

No. A creature's speed does not affect a creature's AC by default. If you feel a creature is particularly agile, of course, you certainly could give it an AC bonus.

>>NN1 follow-up 4b: How does speed reduction based on encumbrance work with creatures with differing base speeds and sizes. Is there an existing metric for these calculations?

No. In general the way I worked out encumbrance for creatures was I did research on what those creatures plausibly could carry. That's why you see encumbrance values primarily for things like horses and mules.

You might look at the D20 SRD or GURPS, both of which often do lots of behind-the-scenes work in some areas I haven't tackled.

GMs, How Much Do You Handwave When Worldbuilding?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/gms-how-much-do-you-handwave-when-worldbuilding>

May 28, 2013

Tag: Q&A

LibraryLass wrote:

Do you go into detail with exact populations and productivity levels of every little settlement in case your PCs decide to build their strongholds amidst their old stomping grounds, or do you tend to just go with a ballpark figure and the market class, or even less?

When I make the region, I make a default stronghold and settlement at each tier that I use if they encounter one that I haven't prepped.

I make trade routes and DMs for Class IV and above settlements.

How Far Ahead Do You Plan Your ACKS Campaign?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/how-far-ahead-do-you-plan-your-acks-campaign>

July 08, 2013

Tag: **Insight**

fletch137 wrote:

What kind of "future development" aspects have you included in your campaign world? My map holds a couple areas ripe for the lord's "go build me a castle there" future domain building quests, but I'd love to be able to pepper in more elements that will grow as the PCs do.

Does your game setting have any rival adventurers destined to be rival barons? Political situations in neighboring kingdoms that your PCs will have to keep an eye on as they quest? What kind of rumors are you planting to coax PCs to where you want them? Ancient secrets to be unearthed over a dozen levels?

My ACKS campaigns follow a particular methodology.

The sandbox is built ahead of time, more-or-less following the guidelines in ACKS. I do not necessarily flesh out every dungeon in advance, but I at least know it's rough denizens, size, and monsters, or what module I'll be using for it if I'm borrowing a pre-existing element.

I then set the setting in a state of chaos. Generally, in the Auran Empire, it's the declining state of civil government (pre-civil war, more or less), ringed with rising powers seeking to take what the Empire has. I sketch out the major players in the civil government and nearest enemy nation at a high level.

I then usually have a hidden existential threat. I sketch out a timeline in which this threat's plans will be operational.

Every few weeks, I update my documents on the plans of the civil rulers and existential threats, and factor in how they are responding to changing events.

Actual dungeons I try to have written 2-3 weeks in advance.

Terrain and the Limits of Civilization

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/terrain-and-limits-civilization>

August 13, 2013

Tag: Q&A

SClaytonU wrote:

In designing my campaign world, I have noticed that geographic barriers such as mountain ranges, heavy forests/jungles, badlands, swamps, etc. seem to provide no impediment to the growth of civilization or trade. If I set down a city in the shadow of a chain of towering mountains, 50 miles worth of hexes within and beyond those mountains are every bit as civilized as if they were broad expanses of grassy plains. The same is true of trade routes; so long as a road through the mountains exists, the terrain seems to have no effect whatsoever on the viability of trade between two markets on opposite sides of the range.

While searching the forums for prior treatments of this topic, I came across a discussion in which it was mentioned that terrain types once had an effect on population densities, but that it required too much hex-by-hex book keeping in service to dubious notions of historical accuracy. While I can see how that would be the case for population density, I think the same need not be said of trade routes and the ranges of civilized/borderlands areas stretching forth from cities.

The apparent solution would be to double the value of every hex containing such terrain when calculating commerce and civilization ranges. This would allow for such terrain to create natural borders, while still avoiding the problems inherent in placing hard limits on the level of civilization possible within such places.

My only concern in instituting this as a house rule immediately is the possibility that I may foul up the balances of some other aspect of the world building/commerce system. So I bring it to the Autarchs.

If every hex of "impassable" terrain were to count as 2 hexes for the purposes of calculating trade routes and the ranges of civilization, how would this impact the other assumptions of the campaign building system?

You are completely correct. This is an area of the rules where I hoped to offer more detail than I ultimately ended up putting in the rule book.

For a better simulation, calculate the range of trade by counting each hex that the road passes through, applying the inverse of the Terrain Movement Multiplier to each hex's distance.

Terrain Movement Multiplier

Desert, hills, wooded areas x3/2

Thick jungle, swamps, mountains x2/1

The only impact on the assumptions of the system will be to have more realistic trade routes, e.g. it'll be a good thing.

CatDoom then wrote:

I've got a somewhat odd but closely related question, myself. Lets say you've got a city on a river surrounded by inhospitable terrain that's home to nomadic herders. Would the pastoralists enjoy a higher population density within the radius of "civilization" around the city, or would the land be treated as wilderness because it doesn't have a sedentary, agricultural population?

It's kind of a corner case I know, but I'd like to hear your opinion, because I could see it working either way. On the one hand having a city around isn't going to magically create more forage for the nomads' herds, but on the other hand the nomads might have access to other resources acquired through trade with the settled folk around the city.

CatDoom, great question.

Functionally speaking, a hex's classification as civilized, borderlands, or wilderness has three in-game effects:

- 1) It determines maximum population density
- 2) It determines the cost to garrison the hex
- 3) It determines the frequency of random encounters

Hexes can become civilized or borderlands in one of two ways:

- 1) If the hex is located near a city, a domain can begin as civilized or borderlands
- 2) If the hex and its surrounding hexes gain enough population, the hexes can upgrade to civilized or borderlands

In the case at hand, there is a city present, so the nearby hexes would be civilized hexes by default.

However, you've determined that the surrounding terrain is inhospitable and held by nomads. You would be well within your rights to simply specify (by Judge's fiat) that the surrounding terrain is too inhospitable to become civilized, and to say that all those hexes are borderlands or wilderness (depending how inhospitable you make it).

Since bad, inhospitable terrain is likely to be tough to police and more populated by monsters, this seems to me to be the more reasonable way to handle.

The rules can't/don't cover every corner case so you should feel free to modify them to reflect the reality of your game world. Dungeons, Dungeon Generation

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/dungeons-dungeon-generation>

June 03, 2014

Tag: Q&A

susan_brindle wrote:

So, as a retroclone, ACKS is built with the assumption that the PCs will do a lot of dungeon delving. Do you guys generally actually follow through on that assumption? I ask because prior to ACKS, running dungeon crawls was actually something I only very rarely did.

As such, I have a few direct questions for the forums, but I'd also really appreciate your general insights and philosophies with regard to dungeon design, just to help me get a better feel for the general sphere within which DMs fall.

Also, as usual, when I say "Questions" I actually mean "Guesses at how the rules are meant to be"

So, as I understand it:

1. Treasure is added to the map one of two ways: Empty/Trap rooms have a chance of simply possessing treasure, and Lair rooms have treasure per the monster type.

2. Lairs can happen one of two ways:

A. Each time a monster room is rolled, there's a chance it's a lair room

B. If many monsters of one type are present, then they can reach critical mass and form a lair.

Questions: Some monsters have Lairs that consist of multiple Encounters. For example, A Gnoll Lair is occupied by a Gnoll Warband, which is 1d6 Gnoll Gangs, which are each 1d6 Gnolls. If I'm stocking my dungeon, and I roll a monster room that's a Gnoll Lair, should I then roll 1d6 to see how many gangs occupy the lair, or should I just gather all the Gnoll Rooms previously rolled in the dungeon around the lair?

*If I *should* roll to see how many gangs there are around the lair, are these gangs all in the lair, (Meaning the party potentially opens the door onto a single huge room with 36 gnolls) or should I distribute them around the lair?*

If I should distribute them around the lair, do I create new rooms, or just plop them into the empty rooms previously generated?

Also, while I'm on the subject of humanoid monster encounters, they all seem to come with champions. Are those part of the number rolled, or in addition to? (That is, if I roll my 1d6 for a Gnoll Gang, and I roll a 1, is that a single gnoll champion, or is it one normal gnoll and his champion friend?)

Also, what kinds of things fall under "Unique Rooms?" I mean, I get that it's meant to be a bit of a wild card, but are your uniques generally good? Bad? High treasure high danger? Tricky puzzle blocking access to the next level of the dungeon?

So, as a retroclone, ACKS is built with the assumption that the PCs will do a lot of dungeon delving. Do you guys generally actually follow through on that assumption? I ask because prior to ACKS, running dungeon crawls was actually something I only very rarely did.

APM: Dungeon crawling has always been a part of my ACKS campaigns, personally. The campaigns have tended to be 75% dungeon-crawling in the early levels, 50% dungeon in the mid-levels, and probably still 33% dungeon in the late levels.

So, as I understand it:

1. Treasure is added to the map one of two ways: Empty / Trap rooms have a chance of simply possessing treasure, and Lair rooms have treasure per the monster type.

APM: Yes.

2. Lairs can happen one of two ways:

- A. Each time a monster room is rolled, there's a chance it's a lair room
- B. If many monsters of one type are present, then they can reach critical mass and form a lair.

APM: Yes.

Questions: Some monsters have Lairs that consist of multiple Encounters. For example, A Gnoll Lair is occupied by a Gnoll Warband, which is 1d6 Gnoll Gangs, which are each 1d6 Gnolls. If I'm stocking my dungeon, and I roll a monster room that's a Gnoll Lair, should I then roll 1d6 to see how many gangs occupy the lair, or should I just gather all the Gnoll Rooms previously rolled in the dungeon around the lair?

APM: You should roll 1d6 to see how many gangs occupy the lair.

If I *should* roll to see how many gangs there are around the lair, are these gangs all in the lair, (Meaning the party potentially opens the door onto a single huge room with 36 gnolls) or should I distribute them around the lair?

APM: You should distribute them around the dungeon. It is ok to have more than one gang in a room, but you would not normally have all of the gangs in one room, unless there is some special reason for it. Refer to, for example, B2 Keep on the Borderlands for an example of a reasonable beastman lair distribution. Refer to G1, Steading of the Hill Giant Chief, for an example of having virtually all the monsters in one room for a particular reason (a feast). (Those are both classic AD&D modules).

If I should distribute them around the lair, do I create new rooms, or just plop them into the empty rooms previously generated?

APM: You would distribute them into (a) rooms that you haven't yet stocked; (b) empty rooms that you've previously generated which are nearby; or (c) rooms you've already stocked with monsters or traps. You would use your prudent judgment to decide which makes the most sense. This part is more art than algorithm.

Also, while I'm on the subject of humanoid monster encounters, they all seem to come with champions. Are those part of the number rolled, or in addition to? (That is, if I roll my 1d6 for a Gnoll Gang, and I roll a 1, is that a single gnoll champion, or is it one normal gnoll and his champion friend?)

APM: Champions are always in addition to the number encountered.

Also, what kinds of things fall under "Unique Rooms?" I mean, I get that it's meant to be a bit of a wild card, but are your uniques generally good? Bad? High treasure high danger? Tricky puzzle blocking access to the next level of the dungeon?

APM: What I typically do is use the Unique Rooms to balance out the dungeon I've generated. For instance, if the dungeon is low on treasure, I might make the unique rooms be rich with loot. If the dungeon has turned out to be very deadly, I might add a place of sanctuary or healing. On the other hand, if the dungeon has too much treasure, it can be a money-sink of some sort, or hideous trap, or special monster-closet. This, again, is where algorithm leaves the equation and artistry enters it, though.

susan_brindle then wrote:

The book makes references to mega-dungeons. What defines one relative to a normal dungeon? How many rooms/floors is a "normal dungeon?"

Hmm, I wonder if I can figure out just from the book-

The book describes a small dungeon of 1-3 encounters as a "half session." If we assume that 30% of rooms have monster encounters, then we can assume a maximum of roughly 3x as many rooms as encounters, meaning lairs have between 1-9 rooms.

So if 1-3 encounters is a half session, then 2-6 (We'll say 4) is a full session. So a "Normal" dungeon is 12 to 24 rooms. A Large dungeon is 6-10 sessions, which means between 72 and 120 rooms.

My gut says between 10 and 20 rooms is appropriate for each floor, and the dungeon previews in the back of the book bear this out; there's a picture of a 10 room castle, and an absurd 60 room Dwimmermount preview (but Dwimmermount is being released as its own book, which means it's probably more than a bit larger than your standard one.)

"Finally, place one low-level mega-dungeon close to the border, one mid-level mega-dungeon a moderate distance away, and one murderously hard mega-dungeon on the far side of the map."

"Of the 30 dungeons, we recommend 3 large dungeons each designed for about 6-10 sessions of play; 10 dungeons designed for 1-2 sessions of play; and 17 small "lair" dungeons designed for a half-session of play, i.e. 1-3 encounters. Each point of interest in the regional map should initially receive one paragraph of description."

In the example above, The "3 large dungeons" and "one low-level mega-dungeon, one mid-level mega-dungeon, and one hard mega-dungeon" are synonymous.

Math:

30% of rooms are encounters

A typical dungeon has 10 to 30 rooms per dungeon level, averaging 20.

6-10 sessions = 12 to 60 encounters = 40 to 200 rooms = 2 to 20 levels

1-2 sessions = 2 to 12 encounters = 7 to 40 rooms = 1 to 2 levels

1 session = 2 to 6 encounters = 7 to 20 rooms = 1 level

1 half-session = 1 to 3 encounters = 3 to 10 rooms = 1/2 level

Dwimmermount has 13 levels 45 to 60 rooms per level, and 13 levels, for around 650 rooms total. It's equal to the size of all three mega-dungeons I recommend putting on your campaign map.

By the standards of the ACKS rules, Dwimmermount is a mega-mega dungeon. It covers low, mid, and high-level all in one.

Musings on Class Demographics

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/musings-class-demographics#comment-17596>

August 07, 2014

Tag: Q&A

susan_brindle wrote:

I'd like to come up with a generalized set of rules so that as a GM I can have a rough idea of how many paladins are in my country. Obviously, there's a lot to think about here.

Known fact #1:

1. From the core rulebook that the breakdown of classes is roughly 4:2:2:1

Known Fact #2:

2. Core rulebook also provides how many classed characters exist in any given urban settlement. In a small village, there'll be 27 classed characters out of a population of ~87. That's 31%, right? A city, meanwhile has 900 classed characters out of a population of 3750~. That's actually only 24% oddly enough, but we'll get back to that later.

Known Fact #3:

3. Core rulebook also provides how frequent classed characters are, and what proportion of a realm's population lives both in that settlement and in the "urban" population in general. We can see that "Urban population" is consistently just 10% of the whole. We can also see that the largest settlement is just 1/5th the urban population.

Thus, by reversing these charts, we can say that the largest settlement holds 2% of the realm's population.

*ANALYSIS: Let's go back to those numbers- 31% seems ridiculously high, right? It's important to remember though that population is measured in *families.* If a family is ~5 people, then that gives us a little over 6% of the population as classed, which is consistent with Alex's 1:20 numbers. It's not unimaginable that a lot of the low-level characters *would* hang out on the fringes; they're not powerful enough to win great glory, but their enhanced skills and fighting ability might help them protect their families. These are all our grizzled woodcutters.*

Likewise, that's 18750 people in the average city, with 900 heroes, so .048; just shy of the 5%. This is an important number, since it means that the proportion of heroes/nonheroes in the city is roughly the same as outside of it, so you can just multiply the numbers on the urban tables by 50 to get realmwide tables. Huh. This'll be a lot easier than I thought.

So, since the base ratio is 4:2:2:1, we can describe each class as occupying so many 9ths of the class-based population, and so many 180ths of the total population. (Or so many 36ths of the population-in-families.) Thus, every 36 families will yield one mage, two clerics, two thieves, and four fighters.

Sidebar: Alex suggested here(<http://autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/recruitment-pc-classes>) that we could model conscripting wizards by assuming 10% of the populace was intelligent enough to go to wizard school, along with a 60% dropout rate at hogwarts, for a total of 4% of the population being capable of wizarding. Since the 1/180 model presents "naturally occurring" (IE: Someone else taught them) mages as appearing at a rate of %.55 of the population, this means that roughly 6/7 people with magical potential never receive any training and presumably just lead lives as bakers and engineers to whom very odd things happen sometimes. This doesn't really relate to our goal; mostly I just wanted you to know that even in a world of magic and whimsy most people's special skills go undiscovered. Feel sad now.

So now that we have 4/36, 2/36, and 1/36 as the foundation, we should tackle class bloat, since, after all, there are far more than four classes. Let's assume that when we say there are four "Fighters" per 36 families, we actually mean four people with fighter-like aptitudes. This then mandates the division of all classes into four aptitudes- martial, agile, magical, and divine, and then based on your own realm's demographics, you can decide what proportion of a realm's martial characters are barbarians vs fighters vs explorers.

I think the easiest and most sensible way to divide them is based on primary stat, since even though a bard lives a relatively similar life to a Fighter (and has a castle-building endgame rather than a hideout-building endgame) his core skillset of acrobatics and charisma means he'll come from the same pool of potential recruits as the thief. There are going to be a lot of judgement calls here, so feel free to adjust them for your own campaigns. Still, if anyone's like me and is interested, here's a rough list of each division:

Martial Classes:

Fighter

Explorer

Barbarian

Monk

Thrassian Gladiator

-Elf

Ranger

--Dwarf

Vaultguard

Fury

Agile Classes:

Thief

Bard

Assassin

Venturer

-Elf

Nightblade

--Dwarf

Delver

Divine Classes:

Anti-Paladin

Cleric

Bladedancer

Paladin

Priestess

Shaman

--Dwarf

Craftpriest

Arcane Classes:

Mage

Ruinguard

Gnome Trickster

Wonderworker

Warlock

-Elf

Spellblade

Courtier

Enchanter

--Dwarf

Engineer

*Now you just have to figure out what fraction of each aptitude should be each class, then multiply it by 1/36, and then multiply *that* number by your realm's population in families, and you'll know how many Paladins are in the kingdom!*

Tomorrow I'll see if I can hash out numbers for demi-humans, since it's been pointed out they don't militarize or adventure at the same rate. I've included them in my aptitude divisions though, just on the assumption that a sufficiently large human city should always have at least a handful of dwarven berserkers hanging around in taverns.

Here is some data I extracted from my 2012 spreadsheets:

% by Character Class at 1st level

1.85% Elven Nightblade

2.78% Elven Spellblade

4.63% Explorer

6.94% Bladedancer

9.72% Cleric

36.57% Fighter

11.57% Thief

9.72% Mage

6.94% Assassin

4.63% Bard

2.78% Dwarven Vaultguard

1.85% Dwarven Craftpriest

These percentages would have to be re-done to incorporate the Player's Companion classes. I think to be genuinely accurate one would create a chart for each culture in the society and then also a total chart across all cultures. That would be very setting specific.

Also, by default these percentages do not stay true at the macroeconomic level over time. Initially a percentage of characters whose economic wealth would make them classed are assumed to be non-classed specialists. As specialists are limited in their maximum wealth and power, this number decreases over time. The excess bleeds into the number of mages, who eventually are about 20% of classed characters by 14th level.

ACKS of Athas: Some Worldbuilding Assistance, If You Will

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/acks-athas-some-worldbuilding-assistance-if-you-will>

June 10, 2013

Tag: Q&A

JonWake wrote:

Hey everybody. I've been playing a game of Dark Sun heavily informed by ACK's world building policies. I'm using the DnD NEXT playtest rules, and in all honesty, in the event of a TPK I'm switching to ACKs full-bore. (I'm one of those DM's who system hops pretty religiously.)

Introduction aside, I'm setting up a war between the city states of Urik and Tyr, and I am having a helluva problem figuring out what the military might of each of these cities is. Let me set up my assumptions, first.

The city states of the Tablelands in Athas are roughly the equivalent of the city-states of Greek Antiquity. Because there isn't much in the way of natural resources on Athas, all civilization is densely clustered around pockets of arable land. These pockets are roughly the size of a domain, so 16 6-mile hexes or so. In between these areas, the landscape cannot support a dense population.

So here's my problem: The population is extremely centralized around the city-states, but according to the setting information, the city population doesn't go above 6,000 families. Extrapolating from the urban demographics chart, the city-states are the largest cities in the region, and the region seems to contain as a whole has 3.75-4 times as many families. Lowballing it gives a rural population of 24,000 families. If we assume that this only includes the domain around Tyr, this gives a population density of 1500 families per hex-- obviously wrong.

I've been trying to build the region, but the population numbers just aren't working for this setting. So that seems to tell me that I need to work from the ground up and ignore the top-down system. But that led to other issues: when I calculated the income from a region, the result was 3-5 times what the book suggested. Again, I assume I'm doing something wrong, but I have no idea what it is.

On the flip side, I figured out how to handle Dragon Kings, and the Merchant rules has turned the game into a whole new beast. Which is good.

According to <http://www.digitalwanderer.net/darksun/> Tyr has a population of 15,000 - that equates to 3,000 families in ACKs.

Using the chart on page 231, assuming an urban realm with a centralized settlement pattern, a city of 3,000 families traces up 4 rows to a realm with 12,500 to 22,499 families. Assuming Tyr fills a full 16-hex domain, then it can have 12,500 families.

In a normal game-world, filled with settlements, that would suggest that the ruler of Tyr is around 7th-9th level.

I would probably model them as 10th level Zaharan sorcerer-priests (HD 1, Fighting 0, Divine 2, Zaharan 4). Then replace "After the Flesh" with "Into the Scales", where they need to transform into dragons in order to advance past 10th level.

Ideal Starting Town Size?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/ideal-starting-town-size>

September 24, 2013

Tag: Q&A

golan2072 wrote:

I'm considering the option of starting my game in Harat, City of the Free, a Class-III Market of 4,000 families and an independent city-state known for its abolition of slavery (which is widely practiced in the rest of Kanahu). Twenty years ago, gladiators headed by Hardun, a Lizardman Gladiator, led a massive slave revolt against Harat's corrupt sorcerer-king and Chaos-worshipping nobility, overthrowing the old regime and abolishing slavery. The current regime is ad-hoc and quite anarchic (if Lawful), with King Hardun being the titular ruler, and personal fighting ability and cunning being much more respected than which family you were born to (think of a (Lizardman) Spartacus taking over Rome!). Gladiatorial games are common but are entered by free men (and lizards), and are mostly non-lethal but sometimes lethal as well; trial by gladiatorial combat and dueling in public (with the public placing bets on the duelists!) are common ways of resolving disputes.*

Outside the city you have a semi-feudal system where Hardun's trusted lieutenants rule the various sub-domains (and have the right to tax them and to conscript locals into the militia) but do not own the land outright; the old Latifundia of the old noble class were split into smaller, independent farms and distributed to their freed slaves, who are now freemen farmers.

This city has much flavour to it, as well as numerous adventuring opportunities, but I wonder if it is not large enough for a starting location. Would a 4,000-family, Class-III-Market settlement be ideal for a campaign's start (probably starting at level 3), or would a more provincial settlement suit a game's start better?

** This is from my Barbarian Conqueror King setting, which you can see in my blog here:*

<http://spacecockroach.blogspot.co.il/search/label/Barbarian%20Conqueror%...>

A Class III or Class IV city is the ideal size to be the centerpiece of your campaign. Khaibar, in Opelenean Nights, is Class IV, while Jubai is Class III.

If your players are new to old-school RPGs, an even smaller starting area, like the Keep on the Borderlands or Village of Homlet, can be useful, but if they are experienced enough to not be overwhelmed by the additional choices that a city offers, it's great.

Demographics: Wilderlands vs ACKS

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/demographics-wilderlands-vs-acks>

September 24, 2013

Tag: Q&A

DrPete wrote:

So, I've been looking at the Wilderlands, contemplating mashing it up with ACKS. I've noticed that they seem to have very different demographic assumptions. See for example <http://batintheattic.blogspot.com/2009/03/wilderland-demographics.html?m=1>

I'm not sure how compatible they are. Does ACKS assume a vastly different return from agriculture? Are we assuming no agriculture in the wilderness? There are hints that the villages have associated hamlets, so you could argue that they could match, but I'm not sure that do. Won't ACKS assume a much larger number of people outside the village wall.

No, they are not compatible.

MEN PER SQUARE MILE

Per Rob Conley's post:

1 able bodied men = 4 to 5 people or 1 household.

1 sq mile will feed 320 able bodied men

1 sq mile needs 30 able bodied men to utilize at 100%

ACKS's assumptions are as follows

1 able-bodied man = 5 people or 1 family

1 able bodied man can farm 30 acres*

1 sq mile = 640 acres

1 sq. mile = (640/30) 21 able-bodied men to utilize at 100%

It's 21 versus 30.

*Technically an able-bodied man farms 20 acres with 10 acres fallow on a 2/1 rotation. If you assume 1 man per 20 acres with no fallow, then 1 sq. mile requires 32 men, almost exactly the same as Rob's post. So Rob is not far distant from us; but we don't assume all of the acreage is under cultivation year round.

PRODUCTIVITY PER ACRE

This is where the sharp difference occurs.

Rob Conley's post:

1 sq mile will feed 320 able bodied men

ACKS:

1 acre will yield 1 quarter of wheat

1 quarter of wheat = 4gp

1 man will farm 20 acres (10 fallow) = 80gp per man

1 sq mile, with 2/3 of its acres under cultivation, will yield 1,680gp

1 able bodied man needs 3gp per month of wheat for subsistence

1 acre will support $(1,680 / (3 \times 12)) = 47$ able-bodied men

So the productivity of farming in the Wilderlands is roughly 8 times as great as the productivity of farming in ACKS. That has huge implications.

NON-FARMING PRODUCTIVITY

ACKS does some additional work to factor in the production of the women and children, as well as their consumption; we assume each woman produces 80gp of goods per year, each child 10gp of goods per year, and that total consumption for the household is 45gp per year.

Therefore each household produces $(80+80+10+10+10)$ 190gp of economic value, and consumes 45gp of economic value, netting 145gp of economic value.

Peasants live at subsistence level, so the economic value is extracted in rents, taxes, and fees to their landlord. Therefore each household produces $145/12 \sim 12$ gp per month of economic value for their landlord.

This is why ACKS peasant families generate 12gp per month on average for the realm ruler.

Domain Population/Title Flexibility

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/domain-populationtitle-flexibility>

September 25, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Chris wrote:

So the judge's Domain creation for the initial campaign is the only part of ACKS that still makes my eyes cross (Sorry Alex). I have some questions about population distribution and the nature of the realm titles and keen to hear any thoughts.

The total population generated for my primary realm (60 24mi. hexes x 5k families = 300k families) fell inside of the Principality range of population. But where would I start if the generated population was outside the perfect cascade spread of the different realm category populations? Is it assumed that somewhere in the hierarchy there are less than 4 vassals or more than 6 that are serving lords or are personal domain sizes smaller/greater than those listed than those listed?

Where should the hierarchy flex? I had to do a lot of striking down of Barons and their personal domain sizes at the last tier of the realm to get my ending population totals in line. If I was better at my arithmetic I could probably figure it out but I did a lot of erasing of totals on the lists. The Personal Domain size seems a black box to me.

Also, the total population distributed at each tier should include the largest urban settlement correct? In the examples I see the lord's personal domain accounted for and the remaining population divided among the vassals, but should not the settlement population also be taken out of the total distributed to vassals where applicable?

I do understand the nature of these being "guidelines" and the makeup of the realm tables, I am just wondering what direction to flex towards. Beyond the population issues and the domain/vassal qualifications for lordliness, I get the rest of the domain stuff.

Hi!

The guidelines are (or at least should be) far less strict. In the real-world, titles, estates, and holdings are a virtually indecipherable tangle. If you spend an hour reading about the organizational structure of the Holy Roman Empire, Feudal England, Byzantine Empire, or Ottoman Empire, it's difficult to make sense of it at all. It's not at all uncommon for a Baron to be more powerful than a Duke, or for the same title to mean vastly different things in neighboring realms, or for a small realm to have a huge military while a large realm is a fractious, weak mess.

So, if history is any guide, you can do almost anything you want. There are two problems with that much realism.

1) Players, who are learning about your world "part time" (so as to speak) tend to get easily confused if things aren't made very clear. It's one thing for a history major to understand that the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire wasn't really an Emperor in the same sense of the Emperor of the Byzantine Empire. It's much more confusing for a player.

2) For the purposes of a Judge setting up a campaign, "anything goes" is not very helpful in setting up his world.

NOW on to specific questions:

"Where would I start if the generated population was outside the perfect cascade spread of the different realm category populations?"

APM: If the realm is recently established, I would use a realm title for a smaller realm, on the argument that it's up-and-coming. Rome didn't get called an empire until long after it had an empire. On the other hand, if the realm is on the decline, use the realm title of the larger size. The Byzantine Empire kept being called an empire long after it had shrunk to a rump kingdom.

"Is it assumed that somewhere in the hierarchy there are less than 4 vassals or more than 6 that are serving lords or are personal domain sizes smaller/greater than those listed than those listed?"

APM: Yes, you can assume that. What I have found is that if you start with the guideline-specific breakdowns, they won't last even 20 sessions of actual domain-level play. The first war, cataclysm, betrayal, etc. will throw everything off. The reality of your game's realms will vary from the Platonic (ACKSonic?) ideal.

"Where should the hierarchy flex? I had to do a lot of striking down of Barons and their personal domain sizes at the last tier of the realm to get my ending population totals in line. If I was better at my arithmetic I could probably figure it out but I did a lot of erasing of totals on the lists. The Personal Domain size seems a black box to me."

APM: There's no particular magic to it. I simply ran numbers in a spreadsheet arbitrarily until I found something that spit out numbers that lined up with a sample of historical data points.

"Also, the total population distributed at each tier should include the largest urban settlement correct? In the examples I see the lord's personal domain accounted for and the remaining population divided among the vassals, but should not the settlement population also be taken out of the total distributed to vassals where applicable?"

APM: I apologize, but I didn't understand the question.

"I do understand the nature of these being "guidelines" and the makeup of the realm tables, I am just wondering what direction to flex towards. Beyond the population issues and the domain/vassal qualifications for lordliness, I get the rest of the domain stuff."

APM: In general, I would use the (fictional) history of your realm as a guide, per above. It matters much more that the realms make sense within your world than that they reach any particular milestone with regard to the guidelines.

ONE FINAL NOTE:

For each realm, be sure to determine how much income per month (revenue - costs) it's sending to the realm ruler. Then compare that to the domain thresholds. Realm's will tend to be ruled by rulers of a level that's sufficient that domain income is less than their domain threshold. (You can understand why - the domain income would level them up until this is no longer the case).

So, for instance, if a particular realm happens to be amazingly profitable, it will tend to have a high-level ruler, even if its territory is smaller than a traditional kingdom.

Why Are Wilderness Encounters More Numerous?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/why-are-wilderness-encounters-more-numerous>

December 22, 2013

Tag: Q&A

golan2072 wrote:

What is the reason behind the Wilderness Encounter numbers of many monsters being much more numerous than the dungeon encounters? I can understand this for large monster camps in the wilderness, but why are, say, goblin patrols more numerous in the wild compared to the dungeon?

Because the goblins think to themselves, "Encounters in the wilderness are really dangerous! We'd better form into larger groups."

(I know that sounds circular, but it's not. The risk of encountering unexpected high level monsters in the wilderness is real, and therefore makes the wilderness dangerous regardless of the size of goblin patrols. The larger goblin patrols are a response to the wandering wyverns and lion prides.)

Revenue by Realm

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/revenue-realm>

December 16, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Nick Dalton wrote:

Okay, I'm working my way through the Revenue by Realm stuff in the book and am struggling a bit.

In the example on page 230 (2nd column, top), the text reads, "He has already decided that Southern Argollë has a population of 3,000,000, which equates to 600,000 families. Reviewing the Realms by Type table, he sees this is about 30% of the maximum size of a Kingdom. Exactly 30% of 7,776 is 2,332.8; he decides that Southern Argollë will consist of 2,300 domains. On the Revenue by Realm Type table, he estimates that Exarch Lazar should earn about 140,000gp per month from his domains and another 25,000gp per month from various urban settlements."

I don't know where most of these numbers come from.

1. I get that 600,000 families is 30%. I don't know where 7,776 comes from as a kingdom can have up to 9,331 domains, so should it be 30% of that?

2. Domain Income - The book says he'll get 140k, but the max value for kingdoms is listed at 171k, so shouldn't it be 30% of that or 51.3k?

3. Urban Income - Again, the book says, 25k, but the table max is 112k, so shouldn't it be 30% of that or 33.6k?

Thanks.

koewn then wrote:

The 7,776 number is coming off of 'Political Divisions of Realms', as the maximum number of Marches an Empire may hold.

You are totally justified in being confused though, took me a few minutes to figure it out myself just now. I've worked realms up before, but I've never tried to estimate one from the top down, haven't needed to.

The sentence that's probably missing (or a bit of a rewrite that's needed) in that example is:

"To estimate the size of Lazar's realm, the Judge decides to see how many Marches exist underneath his kingdom. As Lazar's Kingdom is 30% of the maximum size, he looks at the Political Divisions of

Realms table to see that the maximum number of Marches in a Kingdom is 7,776. Taking 30% of that, which is 2,332.8, he estimates 2,300 domains.

To estimate his domain income, the Judge looks at the Revenue By Realm Type table. Domain Income from a kingdom is 120K-171K per month, a range of 51K. 30% of 51K is 15.3K, added back to the base 120K is 135.3K. The Judge rounds that to 140K.

Urban income can be calculated the same - from a range of 17.5K-112K (94.5K) 30% is 45.8K (17.5K + 28.35K) per month. However, the Judge decides that Lazar's realm is mostly agrarian, with few dense settlements, and cuts that in about half to 25K."

That could probably be cleaned up a bit, but I hope it suffices. There's room for improvement in that example in the default text.

Whoops. Meant Baronies, typed Marches.

Ludanto then wrote:

Well, that's as close to making sense as we've come so far.

But by that reading, a barony with a bare 120 families makes not 450GP, but 630GP, which is more than halfway up the range. $((120/200) * (750-450) + 450)$

koewn then wrote:

It should make 450GP? My post still might not make sense enough, or I'm not reading something right still :)

The difference in the range for the families is 80, for the income, 300GP.

120 families - 0% of the difference (0GP) - 450GP

200-120 == 80, 0 extra families of 80 == 0% of the difference.

160 families - 50% of the difference (150GP) - 600GP

200-120 == 80, 40 extra families of 80 == 50% of the difference.

200 families - 100% of the difference (300GP) - 750GP

200-120 == 80, 80 extra families of 80 == 100% of the difference.

Alternatively, each family at that level gains $300/80 == 3.75$ GP.

That doesn't hold all the way up, Marches is 2.18GP/family. Empires gain (10100K family difference, 175K GP income difference) 0.017GP per family. I think that's mostly because that table is presenting that income as the tax revenue, so each additional layer of henchmen/subhenchmen/subsubhenchmen are taking out their profit on the way up.

Koewn, you've described it correctly.

You could be the ACKS Sage Advice writer. Amazing.

The reason the scale seems to be weird is, as Koewn points out, that the chart is looking at net income. The income per peasant decreases at each tier because the lower level lords take their cut.

For example, a baron's peasants are worth 12gp per month to him. Of that he passes 2.4gp to his marquis. The marquis passes .48gp of that to his count. The count passes .096 to his duke. The duke passes .0192 to his prince. The prince passes .00384 to his king.

This is a huge factor of the ACKS rules that hasn't gotten much comment. Let me explain what's going on. The system is intended to reflect:

1. The inefficiency inherent in ancient and medieval taxation. With most wealth coming in the form of hard-to-ship goods, both spending and taxation had to be local. A modern government will collect all tax revenue at the national level and then distribute tax revenue back down locally (to schools, welfare, etc.) An ancient government might do that "on paper" but in practice the money is being collected and spent by the local leadership.

That in turn leads to...

2. The tendency of proconsuls, viceroys, and other vassals to grossly enrich themselves rather than pay up to their liege lords. Whether it's Persia, Rome, or England, lower-level lords often become quite wealthy.

That in turn leads to...

3. The fact that for high-ranking nobility, much of their wealth comes from their personal domains rather than from taxation of their nobles. The Roman Emperor's wealth came from the personal province of Egypt. The King of England's wealth came from the royal estates and demesnes.

That in turn leads to...

4. High-ranking leaders not having as much money as they might need for the purposes of fighting and acting at the principality, kingdom, or empire level. To get what they need they have to Call to Arms or Impose Special Taxes (per ACKS Favors & Duties).

That in turn leads to...

5. Morale checks from unhappy nobles...

Nick Dalton then wrote:

Alex, you agreed with Koewn's writeup. What about this part in particular?

"Urban income can be calculated the same - from a range of 17.5K-112K (94.5K) 30% is 45.8K (17.5K + 28.35K) per month. However, the Judge decides that Lazar's realm is mostly agrarian, with few dense settlements, and cuts that in about half to 25K."

So we were meant to understand that the urban settlement income should get cut in half because the realm is mostly agrarian from the example? I just don't see that.

Please confirm if this is a typo or not.

Ludanto then wrote:

Well, there is the little table on page 231 that says, "Agrarian, pastoral realm" and equates that with a smaller urban population by "1-2 rows". If you have a full understanding of how the "Revenue by Realm Type" table works (I don't) then it might not be hard to extrapolate what those smaller settlements mean for urban income.

Ok, looking at urban populations, "one row up" is (very) roughly half the population, which would, I guess, justify half the income as well.

That's correct. It's entirely possible for a realm to have 1/2 or 2x or really any variable amount of urban population relative to its agrarian population. There is no explicit link between the size of the rural and urban population in the actual rules; there is merely a suggestion based on historical averages. Likewise there is no explicit link between the size of a domain and its number of vassals and sub-vassals; again, merely a suggestion based on historical averages.

You absolutely could have a realm which is a Class I city with a 12,500 rural domain and no vassals. You could have a domain which is 500 families but sits at the top of an empire. These would be odd, but odd things happen in history all the time.

Overall, I want to correct what I fear is a misimpression over how the world creation and region creation guidelines in the Secrets chapter are intended to be used.

Those rules are not intended to have any more "force" than the dungeon stocking rules, treasure type rules, or wandering encounter rules. As Judges, all of you feel comfortable creating a dungeon that doesn't follow the dungeon stocking rules, right? ("This dungeon was made by a thief who loves traps, so its filled with traps!") All of you feel comfortable tossing out the treasure types when you want to, right? ("The dragon has just had its hoard stolen and is in a rage about it.") Same thing is meant to be true of the region and world creation rules.

If you follow them exactly, you'll get average kingdoms, baronies, empires, etc. They'll be plausible and coherent within a range of realism based on certain periods of history. But as the saying goes, history isn't realistic. If your world ONLY uses the guidelines it will be less gonzo than our actual world.

So, please, don't slavishly follow those guidelines. What will make your campaign different is where you break them. Put a Class I city in the mountains filled with dwarves. Have the Emperor running a 500-family domain because he's a religious theocrat who allegedly has renounced wealth. Whatever.

Fixed Encounter Density

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/fixed-encounter-density>

January 29, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Uqbarian wrote:

'Constructing the region' (page 235) recommends 45 static points of interest in a 1200-hex region. That's about 1 point per 27 hexes. But under 'Dynamic lairs' on the same page, the text says 'At this point, the regional map should have a density of about one point of interest every 6 hexes (36 miles)...'

Am I missing something? Or is the idea that static points average out to being 6 hexes away from each other static point? (With each at the centre of a 2.5-hex zone, that would be roughly 1 static point per 27.5 hexes.) Alternatively, is the idea that the random encounters work out so that static points plus dynamic lairs will tend to come out to about 200 encounters?

farmcodegary then wrote:

*I think it refers to the *distance* between points, not the density.*

Farmcodegary has it correct. The average distance between points of interest should be 5-6 hexes.

Or put another way, the sentence should read "...a density of about one point of interest every 6 square hexes (36 miles x 36 miles)."

Tom Hudson then wrote:

Aargh, hexes being used as both linear and area units makes this require a double-take. As is the fact that a region spanning 6 x 6 hexes square isn't 36 x 36 miles...

If you want to get into the math of it:

45 POI in 1,200 hex region.

1 hex ~ 32 square miles

1,200 hexes ~ 38,400 square miles

38,400 sq mi / 45 POI = 853 sq mi per POI

853 sq mi / 32 sq per hex = 26.6 hexes per POI

...which is exactly what I said

What does the "square" shape of 853 sq miles / 26.6 hexes look like?

$853 \text{ sq mi}^{(0.5)} \sim 29 \text{ miles}$

$26.6 \text{ hexes}^{(0.5)} \sim 5.15 \text{ hexes}$

...since you can't have partial hexes, I rounded to 6

farmcodegary then wrote:

Is that density given with the assumption that points of interest are automatically discovered when entering the hex?

bobloblah then wrote:

Short answer: yes. Alex mentions this in another thread around here, somewhere. At this density the players not discovering what you've placed in a hex is going to lead to a lot of boring gameplay with nothing much happening. You could, of course, create many more points of interest, then check to see if the characters find them as they enter a hex (via their actions or appropriate Throws). The downside to this is that you need to prepare vastly more material in advance, which the system described in ACKS avoids; it minimizes Judge prep, while still providing an interesting play experience.

That's exactly correct. In *Lairs & Encounters* I provide some details on the density of "hidden lairs" that have to be searched. It would range from 1d2 in every clear hex to as many as 2d8 in a hex of jungle wilderness.

As a Judge you are always forced to scale the game to the level of interest of the environment. A 6-mile hex is a good scale because it's possible to march through a few in a day's travel, but we shouldn't let that fool us. A hex is a really big area. My entire city of Durham, including 5 parks, a forest, 2 country clubs, the entire Research Triangle Park, our downtown, and all of our suburbs, fits more-or-less in one 6-mile hex.

(Of course it gets even wilder in science-fiction games, where hexes are planets or solar systems, and points of interest are the one interesting thing on the planet...)

Balancing Encounters Like In Rules Cyclopedia

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/balancing-encounters-rules-cyclopedia>

April 27, 2014

Tag: Q&A

ivowiblow wrote:

Hi!

I understand the motivation of ACKS regarding not leveling the encounters for the party but just making coherent dungeons and leveling the dungeon levels (how many times I said "level"?)

However, I like the idea of knowing in advance if a encounter will be hard or easy for the party, as I don't want to kill them if they are in a good track. Mostly for adventures that are not "going to a dungeon and get the treasure" but missions. I don't want to send them to a death trap just because I don't know. I want to know and then do whatever I want.

I found some comments regarding this in the Rules Cyclopedia (pages 100 and 101) and I like the way it's put.

In a nutshell:

1. Determine the TPL (Total Party Level) of the PC party

- SUM of all the character levels*
- For every <level number> hit points of damage, reduce 1 level. e.g. Fighter lvl 8 will reduce 1 level for every 8 hit points of damage.*

2. Determine the Individual Adjusted Hit Dice of the Monsters

- SUM of all the HD*
- plus * and special abilities*
- minus the minuses*

3. Determine the type of challenge faced

- Get the ratio between both levels.*
- if Monsters represent 20-30% is easy*
- if Monsters represent 30-50% is a good fight*
- if Monsters represent 50-70% is challenging*
- if Monsters represent 70-90% is major*
- if Monsters represent 90-110% is risky*
- if Monsters represent 110+% is Extremely dangerous*

I'd like to know if it makes sense for ACKS numbers-wise as I'll intent to use it.

I personally am not a fan of systems like this. RPGs tend to have too many intransitive relationships for a mechanical balancing mechanism to function.

That said, if you want to try:

1. ACKS characters are somewhat more powerful than Rules Cyclopedia characters. The ability of fighters to cleave through the opposition means that, e.g., 5 orcs are much less of a threat to a 5th level fighter than in Rules Cyclopedia. The ability of mages to freecast their desired spells is a nice buff. You need to calculate most characters as being at +1 level, and mages and elves at being +2 levels above their HD for purposes of encounter effectiveness.
2. Insofar as you introduce antagonists who can "alpha strike", the system can be readily broken. Consider a party of 9 1st level characters (TPL 9) encountering a single 1st level mage with Sleep (adjusted HD $1/2+*+=2.5$). This would be a 27% ratio, or "easy". But if the mage gets his spell off, he has a 50%+ chance of wiping out the party... Which is extremely dangerous.
3. Because of the discontinuity in the power curve at 1st level and 9th level, the system works best when parties of 3rd to 8th level characters confront non-character monsters.

Example: Marcus (F5), Quintus (M5), Daphne (ES4), and Balbus (C5) confront a group of 4 Ogres (4+1 HD). The party's TPL is $(5+1 + 5+2 + 4+2 + 5+1)$ 25 versus (4×4.25) 17. $17/25 = 68\%$, it will be a challenging fight.

[Worldbuilding] Modeling Places Which Are Built On Completely Different Assumptions?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/worldbuilding-modelling-places-which-are-built-completely-different>

June 15, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Kiero wrote:

My game is historical, set in Massalia (modern Marseille) in 300BC. I'm trying to model the place using the usual rules, but I seem to keep butting up against hard-coded assumptions.

Massalia is a city-state. It doesn't actually control much territory beyond the city and it's chora which never really extended beyond a five-mile radius of the walls (it was completely encircled by a stone wall, the interior about fifty hectares). It had a massive presence in the coastal trade in the western Mediterranean (having wrested pre-eminence in trade flows into and out of Gallia (France) from the Etruscans) and deep into Gallia via the Rhodanos (Rhône) river. It was rich, but not because of land, but trade.

Map

That map actually over-estimates the area of control Massalia really had.

It set up trading posts all along the southern coast of Gallia and northwestern coast of Iberia (Spain), places for ships bound for, and heading out from Massalia to stop, take on food and water, shelter from bad weather. None is bigger than a village in domain terms (they include Monoikos, Nikaia, Antipolis, Olbia, Tauroeis, Agathe). They were allied with other settlements set up by their parent city, including Emporion (Empuries) in Iberia, Alalia on Kyros (Corsica) and Elea in Italia. But all of those are technically beyond the sea-trade range of a Market class IV which it's size merits.

It might be a Duchy, from the largest settlement size (Massalia is 1200 families at this time), except it controls virtually no territory besides the city itself. It has trade links with two important settlements inland, Rhodanosia and Thelina/Arelate, but it ceased to have any effective political control over them a century earlier. It does, however, have economic control over them.

It's a major market nexus, for trade going into Gallia, and trade coming out of Gallia, but isn't really much of a destination in and of itself. They exported their own products; local wine, salted pork and fish, aromatic and medicinal plants, coral and cork, salt, olive oil, cups, mixing bowls, to inland markets in Gallia. They were a destination for re-export primarily of grain, amber, tin and slaves. That control over a huge portion of trade should really merit a bigger market than class IV, even though it's a large town at best in population terms. Because it can't support itself from the land it controls (barely more than a few 6-mile hexes immediately adjoining the city), it supports itself from trade.

It also has no "prince" nor "ruling family"; it's an aristocratic republic ruled by an assembly of 600 citizens, with an executive body of fifteen elected from that number. And again, without trade, few of those citizens would have much wealth at all.

So how do I model this?

Kiero, this is a great question to bring up. I think this sort of thing causes people no end to grief.

The first thing to note is that the domain and settlement rules and guidelines in ACKS shouldn't bind you, as Judge, any more than the dungeon creation rules or wilderness encounter rules bind you. In all cases, we are offering clear and straightforward mechanics for standard situations, but when your setting requires it, you should simply do what is required! The real-world is filled with thousands of examples of settlements and realms that would be a bad idea to "hard code" into the game mechanics, even though we all know they existed. (It's similar to how you can't design a good wargame by modeling the fastest-bestest marching times / rates of fire / kill rates, you have to base it on the averages).

To handle Massalia, here's what I'd do:

1. Review the Range of Trade on page 233 of ACKS. Find the length of Massalia's trade routes and then set Massalia as a Market Class of that size.
2. Turn to page 133, and build the city's Revenues as if it was of the appropriate Market Class. (For example, 8gp instead of 7.5gp if it's Class II instead of Class IV). Since Massalia is independent, it does not have to pay taxes. Assuming it is Class II, its revenue should be 9,600gp/month while its expenses are (960gp tithes + 2400gp garrison + 1800gp upkeep) 5160gp/month. This might be divided between the 15 executives, giving them 344gp each per month.

3. If you want to increase Massalia's revenue, you can assign it some Vassal Settlements from your list above, each providing a 20% tax income to Massalia.

That would represent the income that Massalia's ruling families earn from ruling. That's distinct from the wealth they'd earn from controlling trade.

4. A simple way to assign wealth to trade would be to use the Starting City Criminal Guilds table on p.237 as a baseline. Find the city's market class and then allocate the monthly syndicate revenue to the ruling families.

For example, if Massalia is Class II, monthly guild revenue is 75,000gp. Dividing that by 600 yields 125gp per month. That would place each citizen squarely within the "landed patrician" Standard of Living (p.39 of ACKS). You could of course allocate the trade revenues less equally. Perhaps the richest citizen earns 10,000gp from trade (marquis/count), the next richest 5,000gp, the third 2,500gp, the fourth 1,250gp, the fifth 600gp, and the remaining 595 each earn 110gp.

In this context, the wealth earned from controlling the city (344gp/month) is much less than the private wealth of the richest citizenry, but more than the wealth of the average citizenry. Executive positions are thus looked on with nobless oblige by the rich, but with ambition by the poor.

5. Another way to assign wealth from trade would be to build Massalia's revenues as if it were a much larger settlement in terms of population. For example, you could say it has 10,000 families for revenue purposes (Class II). That would mean 80,000gp in revenue per month instead of 9,600, or about 70,000gp. (Note that this yields similar results to #4, it's just a different way of thinking about.

6. Finally, you could model out the great houses' trading wealth using the Arbitrage Trading rules or the Merchant Ships and Caravans tables on p145.

The rules provided in ACKS are focused on the experiences of adventurers conducting arbitrage trading, and didn't get into the guidelines on the maximum economic activity occurring in a realm. The total economic activity in a town attributable to its population* is roughly 10 times the maximum amounts listed on the Markets & Merchandise table. So, for example, a Class II town has a maximum of 90 merchants** (2d4+1 max x 10) each dealing in (4d6 max) 24 loads per month. The average load is worth about 300gp and the average margin is 10%. That suggests (90 x 24 x 300 x .1) 64,800gp in trading profits per month are available to the citizens. We might want to increase that if we think the citizens are exploiting monopolies, adding 10% to the margin to yield 129,600gp per month. Of course some of that is probably foreign traders, and the citizens might have trade activities going on in far-flung towns, but you are at least within the ballpark.

In any event, from three different approaches, I consistently see a range of income per month from trade of about 60k - 120k for your republic.

*This number was derived from Say's Law, which argues that consumption must equal production and vice versa. However, there is no theoretical maximum to how much trade can occur in a town between foreign merchants transacting with other foreign merchants. They are simply "using the platform". If you have to hazard a guess, I would multiple the number of merchants by the number of trade routes to settlements within 1 market class of the same size.

**For simplicity, ACKS "bundles" merchants into a smaller number of bigger buyers. In reality, most merchants are relatively small traders. The actual number is in the thousands but that's a bit too painful to run.

Kiero then wrote:

Within the classes, I'm thinking of breaking down the spoils by quartiles. The top quartile gets 50% of the income; the next 25%; the next 15% and the bottom the remaining 10%.

So taking the cavalry class 42158gp/month (averaging 703gp/month), that actually breaks down as the richest 15 (likely the timoukoi) take 21079gp/month (averaging 1405gp/month); the next richest 15 take 10540gp/month (averaging 703gp/month); the next richest 15 take 6324gp/month (averaging 421gp/month) and the poorest 15 take 4215gp/month (averaging 281gp/month).

For the hoplite class 34585gp/month (averaging 144gp/month); the top 60 take 17293gp/month (averaging 288gp/month); the next 60 take 8646gp/month (averaging 144gp/month); the next 60 take 5188gp/month (averaging 86gp/month) and the bottom 60 take 3458gp/month (averaging 58gp/month).

For the artisan class taking 27012gp/month (averaging 90gp/month); the top 75 take 13506gp/month (averaging 180gp/month); the next 75 take 6753gp/month (averaging 90gp/month); the next 75 take 4052gp/month (averaging 54gp/month); and the poorest take 2701gp/month (averaging 36gp/month).

Interestingly, the poorest of the cavalry class earn less than the richest of the hoplite class, and there's an even broader overlap between the poorest three quartiles of the hoplite class and the richest two of the artisan class, which sounds about right to me.

Festivals - of which there are potentially many in the Greek calendar cost 6000gp, and as mentioned are voted to a citizen to fund as a liturgy, or public service to the city. Obviously there's a great deal of political potential around them - some are prestigious and can make a man's name for the year, but equally they could be used to ruin someone in precarious financial circumstances.

Looking at Demand Modifiers, the factors on that table are relatively straightforward:

Age: 101-1000 years (Massalia is 300 years old at this point)

Water Source: Sea coast (obvious one!)

Climate: Scrub (after some research, apparently most Mediterranean climes are classified as Maquis shrubland)

Elevation: Hills (lots of hilly ground from the tail of the Alps and situated on promontories)

I don't think I want to start with random modifiers for goods-types, but I am confused as to how I apply the reality. The complication is the Massalia was an exchange-point rather than destination for much of it's trade. Its population wasn't that big, things going there weren't for local consumption, but often shipping off again - either to the Gallic interior or out into the wider Mediterranean.

As mentioned before, they exported their own products; local wine, salted pork and fish, aromatic and medicinal plants, coral and cork, salt, olive oil, cups, mixing bowls, to inland markets in Gallia. They were a destination for re-export primarily of grain, amber, tin and slaves.

So perhaps I should read that as negative demand for the first list (since they are produced locally or imported for shipping into Gallia), but positive for the second (since they are things in demand at Massalia to be shipped off elsewhere)? Point then is that if you have the former you need to take them inland yourself, but if you have the latter there'll be someone glad to take it off your hands.

Maybe what I should do is determine the obvious ones, but do the others randomly?

Given the number of settlements Massalia connects to, is this going to get messy when I look at trade routes? The major place it links to is Emporion, which is smaller, and a source of metals.

Climate: Scrub (after some research, apparently most Mediterranean climes are classified as Maquis shrubland)

APM: Scrub is in fact the predominant biome of the Mediterranean area. I didn't even know what Scrub climate was before I started writing the Auran Empire campaign setting.

For those of you who are presumable as ignorant as I was at the start of the process, imagine a ranked list as follows:

grassland -> shrubland -> woodland -> forest

Shrubland is land with woody shrubs. Shrubland is divided vertically into tall shrubland and low shrubland, and horizontally into open and closed shrubland.

Tall shrubland has 6'6" to 26' tall shrubs and is generally known as "scrub".

Low shrubland has 6" to 6'6" tall shrubs and is generally known as "heath".

If the land is 70%-100% covered by shrubs, it is called "closed". If it is 70% to 30% covered by shrubs, it is called "open". If less than 30%, it's probably not shrubland.

Each region has its own unique name for these territories:

Closed Scrub: Chapparal, fynbos, maquis, macchia

http://www.ee.sunysb.edu/~serge/ARW-4/PHOTOS/ZASLAVSKY/Maquis_vegetation...

Open Scrub: Garrigue, phrygana, matorral, mallee, batha

http://azalas.de/bilder/2009-05/DSCN0249-1_450

(note how much more scattered the shrubs are, with gaps filled with grass)

Closed Heath: Heathland, Kwongan

http://www.mediterraneanaction.net/ma_v2/thumbs/http://www.mediterranean...

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/da/Heathland_I.jpg

(note how low, yet densely packed, the shrubs are)

Open Heath: Moorland

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0f/Moorland_above_Attada...

(low, widely spaced shrubs with moss and grass in between)

The Mediterranean region is primarily Closed Scrub and Open Scrub.

Since originally answering this post, I have expanded and deepened the mathematical models I originally built for ACKS. This has led to some more richness in my understanding of city economics.

1. Above I wrote "the total economic activity in a town attributable to its population* is roughly 10 times the maximum amounts listed on the Markets & Merchandise table." In fact, it is roughly 36 times the maximum amounts.
2. Here are the approximate number of merchant ships that a typical city of minimum size for each category could support per month:
Class I: 30 Large Ships, 90 Small Ships, or 45 30-horse Caravans
Class II: 7-8 Large Ships, 22 Small Ships, or 11 30-horse Caravans
Class III: 3-4 Large Ships, 11 Small Ships, or 6 30-horse Caravans
Class IV: 1 Large Ship, 3 Small Ships, or 2 20-horse Caravans
Class V: 1 Small Ship or 2 10-horse Caravans
Class VI: 1 10-horse Caravan
3. The profit that can be earned from monopolizing arbitrage, passenger, and shipping within a city is approximately 15% more than the profit that an independent city of the same size generates for its ruler. See "Merchant Ships and Caravans" table for the profit per ship / caravan.

EXAMPLE: the mercantile profit from a Class I city (20,000 families and 30 Large Sailing Ships) would be (30 large ships x \$2591 per ship) 77,730gp per month. The rulership profit from the same city, if independent, would be (3.34 x 20,000) 66,800gp per month. Note that $66,800 \times 1.15 = 76,820$. [Why 3.34? $3.34 = 8.5\text{gp base} - 2\text{gp garrisons} - 1.5\text{gp upkeep} - 1.66\text{gp festivals}$]

So if you want to create an independent city-state like Venice where the rulers are merchant princes, you can increase their monthly profits by up to 115% to reflect their mercantile holdings.

You could also divide the mercantile holdings between multiple families, if desired.

Kiero then wrote:

Any thoughts on "garrisons" that are actually the ability to muster the population as militia, rather than a standing force? I treated them as 1/4 the regular cost, which seemed to produce the right sort of figures.

In the periods of antiquity I'm dealing with, a garrison was something a foreign power (or local tyrant) imposed on a city to keep it in line, not a welcome source of law and order.

Great question!

Do you happen to know what level of taxation the citizens of a Hellenistic city-state faced? I wonder if - since the citizens themselves were the army - the citizenry paid lower taxes to the government than a city of Imperial Rome paid to Rome for the Roman legions.

If so, you might simply treat it as a wash - the city-state doesn't have to pay its garrison cost (2gp per family) but it collects 2gp less in urban income per family. And the city-state is assumed to be able to call on a military force with monthly wages of (2gp x # of families) as needed.

For a city of 50,000 people (10,000 families) that would mean 20,000 gp per month - enough to field 1,500 heavy infantry.

Kiero then wrote:

In Athens, at least, they paid taxes as well as being expected to train and muster. In the fourth century BC there were 30,000 adult males in Attica paying about 6,000 talents a year in tax. I'm assuming that's silver, not gold.*

Although later payment of taxes became an excuse not to train and muster (as also happened in later Principate Rome), with the expectation the state would hire mercenaries/pay the landless poor to do the fighting.

**And the poorest citizens were expected to train as rowers, though this was unique, most other city-states used professional (non-citizen/foreign) oarsmen.*

A silver talent is equal to 6,000 drachma, which in ACKS terms, are worth 1sp each. So 1 talent = 6,000 sp = 600gp.

6,000 talents x 600gp = 3,600,000gp per year.

3,600,000gp per year / 12 months per year = 300,000 gp per month

300,000 gp / 30,000 families = 10gp per month

Average tax / fees per peasant family in ACKS = 12gp per month

Average garrison per family in ACKS = 2gp per month

$12 - 2\text{gp} = 10\text{gp}$ per month

VOILA!

Domain Density

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/domain-density>

July 08, 2014

Tag: Q&A

James K wrote:

I'm slowly gearing up to run an ACKS campaign, and I'm working on the first regional map at the moment. What I haven't quite gotten my head around yet is the number and size of settlements that's assumed by default.

First off, the "Creating the Region" rules on p235 say to include about 15 settlements, towns and castles. Does any domain stronghold count as a settlement for these purposes, or only the more significant ones? Because if domains are often only 1 hex in size then you don't need a lot of domain hexes to use up all 15.

Secondly, how large should the local settlements be? I'm working on the assumption that most of the settlements are class V or VI with a couple of class IVs, one class III on the region map, a class II that's maybe a week's travel from the edge of the map and the only class I is a long sea voyage away.

Does that sound about right?

For the 15 settlements, you would disregard Class VI settlements and strongholds that are so small that they can control 1 hex or less.

For the local settlements, your assumptions sound quite good. There are some explicit instructions on p. 231 to equate your settlements to your domain sizes but your assumptions have gotten you to the right outcome regardless.

James C. Bennett then wrote:

"For the 15 settlements, you would disregard Class VI settlements and strongholds that are so small that they can control 1 hex or less."

Well, I've been doing that wrong.

So how many Class IV or larger settlements do you generally place in a region, Alex, and at what density? I'm curious because, going by the rules as written, a Class IV or higher market civilizes a 50 mile radius, and makes borderlands of an additional 25 miles beyond that. The recommended region is only 240 miles by 180 miles, so it doesn't take too many Class IVs to crowd the wilderness out entirely.

It's important to note that an area is only civilized or borderlands once its cleared and settled. An area can be within 50 miles of a city and if its filled with monsters it will be wilderness. By implication the rules assume that such an area would not stay wilderness for long, but in particular instances there can be atypical force causing this.

I typically place a Class III or Class IV city in one corner. I then have 3-5 Class V towns in a radius of 6-8 hexes away from the city. I then have a row of tough (75,000gp+) strongholds in a radius 3-5 hexes away from the Class V towns, along the edge of the borderlands. That usually takes up about half the map.

I then place woods, swamp, mountains, or other bad terrain within the civilized and borderlands area, and place some dungeons in those areas.

Gearing Up to Try ACKS Again, Have Misc. Questions

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/gearing-try-acks-again-have-misc-questions>

July 14, 2014

Tag: Q&A

susan_brindle wrote:

[quote=Jard]I'm afraid I don't understand the significance of your question other than the lord controls it.[/quote]

Sorry; let me reword it to place more emphasis on my point of concern:

At the start of the game, the Principality of Realm1 has 150,000 families within it. According to the chart on page 231, this means that the largest settlement in the realm will be a City. I pick an appropriate spot on the map, mark it as the Prince's personal domain, and add a City.

Later on in the game, somehow, an enemy force captures the City and declare their independence from the Principality. Thus, the City now exists not within a Principality of 150,000 families, but within a much smaller realm, perhaps as small as just the six-mile hex containing the city. What effect does this have on the city, assuming that it is never recaptured or integrated into a larger realm?

Jard then wrote:

This may require an answer from Alex to draw the link between real-world historics and the rules that govern ACKs, but there's nothing requiring a particular city to exist in a particular sized realm, it's just an emergent occurrence.

Essentially, each realm is made up of domains, a domain being a region governed by one and only one leader and being no larger than a 24-mile hex. when a ruler is ready to grow beyond this, he must have vassals underneath him, each with their own domains, and that collection of domains is the ruler's realm. In addition, each of those vassals can have subvassals yadda-yadda all the way down, and that's one of two ways that a ruler secures domain income, which in turn influences the level they can reach.

The second way is to make an urban settlement (a city). Each ruler can have 1 city in their personal domain, and they increase the size that it can grow two through urban investment, which becomes exorbitantly expensive as the city grows larger. The end result is that MAKING a big city tends to be so expensive that it is only done by someone with a large realm to fund the process.

However, the situation you are describing is that someone rolls in and conquers that city. What this means in game terms is that someone else is now benefitting from the massive investment the previous ruler made. The likely outcome is that the previous owner has resources to mount a recapturing effort, but perhaps they had previously over-reached and that blow led to a cascade of failures and loss of power.

However in terms of effects of the city, there are none. Each city effectively exists in nothing larger than a 24-mile personal domain, and each adjacent 24-mile hex could likewise have another urban settlement. Thus the city can continue to operate as it was. One thing that might model a sudden being "cut off" from a larger realm is that, if the previous lord of a large realm was pouring resources into growing the city, obviously this lesser lord with much smaller holdings can't do so, and thus the city's development would become arrested and it would cease to grow.

That's about the extent of my understanding of the rules. Alex may be able to add more insight.

Hi Susan! Jard gave a very thorough response. Let me add a few thoughts with mechanics from Domains at War.

- A city likely exists within a domain which is 8 to 16 6-mile hexes.
- An army has occupied a domain when the number of invading troops is sufficiently large enough to constitute an effective garrison.
- An occupied Domain is conquered when all strongholds and settlements within it have been captured. A stronghold or settlement is captured when no opposing units are present within.
- When a leader conquers a Domain, he may be able to add it to his personal domain. In order to be eligible to assimilate the conquest into his personal domain, the newly conquered domain must be adjacent to his personal domain, and his personal domain must not yet be at maximum size. Otherwise, the newly conquered domain may simply be added to the conqueror's realm

In the case you have described, the city has been captured. It is therefore likely that the city's domain has been conquered, assuming enough troops are present to garrison.

There is no particular effect on the city. Nothing in the rules requires that a city exist within a particular sized domain.

Note that the enemy who captured the city and conquered its domain can assign the domain to a vassal and make it part of its realm. There is no rule that requires that domains within a realm be contiguous or adjacent.

Abstracting Domains

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/abstracting-domains>

July 30, 2014

Tag: Q&A

nDervish wrote:

In principle, I really like the amount of detail in the ACKS domain rules. The biggest "Yes!" moment from my players in the last session is when they were approached by the head of the Funerary Guild, who asked if they could provide excavation and stone-working jobs for members who no longer have steady work now that the town's plague had passed. They loved it because it provides them with a huge boost to the rate they can expand their fortifications (from 3gp/day to 13gp/day - it's an isolated settlement of 130 families, so there's no way they're going to get access to the 3,000 workers assumed by the standard 500gp/day construction rate). I loved it because it arose directly out of the economics rules (between a bunch of dead bodies already present from a previous failed settlement and people dying from the plague, they needed to have been burying 3 people a day to keep up; at 5gp per funeral (to ensure a Sinkhole of Evil won't develop), that's 15gp/day of funerary production). I loved it even more from the anticipation of future campaign flavor, as new players join and ask about why all the roads are named "Gravedigger's Way" or "Headstone Plaza" and there's an actual, organic, in-game reason for it rather than it simply being because the GM is a weirdo.

However, fully statting out a domain is a substantial amount of work. Decide on the territory it holds. Buy an appropriate stronghold. Work up some population figures. Calculate tax income. Determine how much of that income to spend on military. Buy units. Etc. Keeping that up-to-date for the PCs' domain takes me about an hour, hour and a half per in-game month, which is acceptable to me, but I've also got half a dozen other factions in the campaign area which I would like to be able to interact with the PCs' settlement (and each other) on the domain level. I finally got around to creating one of them yesterday and realized that building them all in detail will just plain be too much work to be worth it, even taking into account that, without the "actively adventuring" growth bonus, they probably won't change much from month to month.

It's enough that I'm seriously considering dropping the ACKS domain rules in favor of those in [An Echo, Resounding](#), although that brings in all kinds of issues with compatibility (several of ACKS' non-domain rules would need retrofitting to deal with a domain system which abstracts population and territory control away completely) and balance (what happens to the fighter endgame when there's no mechanical reason to build a stronghold? how do you determine divine power from a cleric's congregants when you don't even know how many people are present? no population numbers means no tax collection means no domain XP. etc.).

How do others handle this, such that NPC domains are detailed enough to interact fairly and consistently with PC domains, without having to spend more time managing domain stats than you do on prep for things that will appear directly in the game?

Jard then wrote:

I believe the standard practice is to decide "This NPC realm is a barony/duchy/kingdom" and then use the pre-provided stats for that size of a realm provided in the back of the core rulebook (with extra details in D@W campaigns if you need to then raise armies out of said domains).

It is as Jard said! Chapter 10: Secrets of ACKS and Chapter 1: Armies of D@W Campaigns should allow you to handle any domains you'd like abstractly.

Another alternative is to create the NPC domain but then leave it static. Since most NPC rulers are not actively adventuring and are at fairly average levels of morale, populations will remain stationary.

For quick reference:

Civilized Domain Income = # of Families x 4.73

Borderlands Domain Income = # of Families x 3.73

Wilderness Domain Income = # of Families x 2.73

This assumes 6gp land value, 20% taxes, 10% tithes, 2/3/4gp garrison cost, 5gp in festivals every 3 months, and disregards stronghold value.

I personally only create domains for NPCs when the players swear fealty to, ally with, or go to war with the domain. Otherwise, the only thing you really need to know is "approximately how large is this domain" "approximately how much money does its ruler have" and "approximately how big is its army".

Just because you CAN zoom in to the level of the individual barony, doesn't mean you have to...

nDervish then wrote:

I personally only create domains for NPCs when the players swear fealty to, ally with, or go to war with the domain.

Perhaps my political situation is just too complex, then. The three domains of immediate interest (an orc village, a group of Hell cultists from a distant domain who are occupying an ancient temple, and a mutant cult) are already at war with each other and the PCs' domain could end up at war with any of them on very short notice - or with all three, if they're not careful. In my mind, this makes it important to know what forces all three of them have and where those forces are located.

Plus I'm used to faction systems which are simple enough for every faction to develop and take action every month (or however often faction turns are handled), even if they're on the far side of the world. Even if the PCs don't interact directly with a remote faction, it can still influence the actions of other, closer factions that they do interact with. While I can certainly see that the ACKS rules are set up such that most domains with average morale and non-adventuring rulers don't change much from month to month, I don't like the feeling of "this part of the world is locked away in a stasis bubble until the PCs come along and disturb it". That works fine for monster lairs and other minor populations like that, but factions/domains are the major players in the regional power game, so they shouldn't just be sitting on the sidelines.

Just because you CAN zoom in to the level of the individual barony, doesn't mean you have to...

In this case, yes, I do, because individual barony-sized domains ruled by autonomous warlords are all the area has. The largest is an orc "kingdom" of around 1200 families and, even at wilderness population densities, that's easily within the capacity of a single domain without needing to appoint vassals. Most of the domains are a couple hundred families and some aren't even a full hundred.

What I would do, then, is to flesh out the domains at the level of whatever NPC ruler is making the decisions for them, abstracting the domains below them. Then each game-month you simply update the domain. Initial set-up for each domain should take about 30 minutes to 1 hour. Every session it should take about 15 minutes to update the domains total.

You can use the Vagaries tables to generate events for your NPC domain rulers to deal with. If the NPC domain rulers fight each other, use the Campaigns rules with Battle Ratings (use BR for high level NPCs rather than forays).

Replenishing a Hoard

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/replenishing-hoard>

September 10, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Jard wrote:

So an interesting thing happened in my game. The players, using cunning and the invisibility spell managed to steal a fairly large chunk of the hoard of a group of stone giants without being detected or fighting them (which would have been a slaughter for the party). Excitement! Ingenious! Truly taken from the pages of The Hobbit.

But then the player who orchestrated the heist said something interesting: how they plan to come back and clean out the giants on the regular. Now, aside from the obvious fact that the giants will very shortly be investing in heavy, giant sized, locked chests and traps, it did bring up an interesting question that doesn't come up often: how long does it take a monster to accrue the treasure in their hoard? Indeed, how much do they add to it per month?

I posted this in "Ask the Autarchs" but, realizing this is a bizarre corner case that certainly would never need to be addressed directly in the rules, if anyone has experienced this before and would like to share how they handled it (or even how you WOULD handle it if it happened to your group), I'd love to hear it!

You could assume the monster accumulates treasure equal to the monthly wages of a henchman of a level equal to his HD until he has built up savings equal to his treasure type.

Campaign Constructions

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/campaign-constructions>

December 08, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Nordico wrote:

I have a few questions regarding the guidelines for setting design. According to them, each type of realm can occupy a certain range of territory. In the first example provided, the campaign map has a 1130 24-mile hexes, so I would think that since almost all the map is covered, the wilderness and borderlands ("adventuring regions") are considered among this 1130 hexes. But then, next, the regional map has a principality that only occupies 600 6-mile hexes (half the map); so I would think that those 600 hexes contain only civilized and perhaps some borderland zones, but wilderness zones are among the other half of the map.

I think the question would be something like this: do the standard realm sizes consider that there can be major "wilderness-adventuring zones" inside their boundaries (big chunks of their land occupied by impenetrable forests, cloud-touching mountains, bone-chilling swamps) or are those zones to be considered separated and without jurisdiction? Or, another way of putting it: when I design my maps, should I leave half the map for "The Wilderness" (like the regional map in the example) or should I divide the whole map into realms and consider those places as parts owned (or shared) by those realms (like the campaign map in the example)?

Nordico, that's a great question! The answer is "it's up to you". It very much depends on the nature of your campaign world, and the population density you assume for your civilized realms.

In my own campaign world, the province of Tirenea consists almost entirely of civilized realms, and the baronies are densely packed. In contrast, the province of Southern Argolle is a realm that is at best half-civilized, with large swathes of borderlands wilderness encompassed within the realm, adjacent to a huge portion of pure wilderness. The province of Opelenea is densely populated in its northern (coastal) half, and then largely wilderness in its southern half, but with pockets of densely-populated civilization clustered in oases.

If you are relatively new to world-construction and ACKS, I recommend leaving half the map for wilderness. The easiest way to do so is to split your map in half with a diagonal line running from the north-east corner to the south-west corner. Find the center-point of that line, and then place your largest city 8-12 hexes north-west of the line.

Domains at War

Constructing Siege Engines

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/constructing-siege-engines>

November 20, 2012

Tag: Q&A

James C. Bennett wrote:

Last session, my players recruited a normal man henchman who turned out to have 2 ranks of the Siege Engineering proficiency. Hurrah for random generation!

Now, of course, they want him to start building siege engines. Unfortunately, unlike most of the crafting proficiencies, the description doesn't indicate how much a siege engineer's labor is worth.

So, how does this work? How much work can the siege engineer do per month or day? How many people can work on building one siege engine? Does everyone working on the project have to have 2 ranks of siege engineering, or can the siege engineer lead a team of unskilled laborers? If so, does he improve their output like other overseers? What if the laborers have 1 rank of siege engineering?

This is detailed exhaustively in Domains at War: Campaigns. Here's an excerpt:

Constructing a piece of artillery or siege equipment is handled as construction project. Use the standard Construction Project rules except as follows:

- The normal limits regarding construction sites do not apply to artillery and siege equipment. Any number of siege engines may be constructed simultaneously at the same site, provided enough supervisors are available.
- The number of workers able to work on any particular piece of artillery or siege equipment is limited. Huge siege towers are capped at 800 workers. Large siege towers are capped at 200 workers. All other artillery and siege equipment are capped at 50 workers. Because of these limits, craftsmen rather than unskilled laborers generally do the bulk of the work.

EXAMPLE: King Edward Longshanks orders the construction of a heavy trebuchet (2,500gp) under the supervision of a siege engineer. He assigns 5 master craftsmen, 10 journeymen, 20 apprentices, and 15 unskilled laborers, for a total of 50 workers. The project has a construction rate of $(5 \times 5\text{gp/day}) + (15 \times 0.1\text{gp/day})$ or 26.5gp per day. After $(2,500 / 26.5)$ 94 days, a little over three months, the workers finishes construction of the trebuchet. King Edward dubs it "Warwolf" and immediately smashes Stirling Castle with it.

NOTE: "Construction rate" is more-or-less the worker's monthly wage divided by 30. For example, a laborer who earns 3gp per month has a construction rate of 1sp per day.

So, how does this work? How much work can the siege engineer do per month or day?

- It depends how many workers he has available

How many people can work on building one siege engine?

- Up to 50 for most siege engines, 200 for large towers, 800 for huge towers

Does everyone working on the project have to have 2 ranks of siege engineering, or can the siege engineer lead a team of unskilled laborers?

- The siege engineer can lead a team of unskilled laborers

If so, does he improve their output like other overseers? What if the laborers have 1 rank of siege engineering?

- A siege engineer earns 50gp per month, so his daily construction rate would be 1.67gp per day. He does not improve their output, but is required to do the project at all.

A laborer with 1 rank of siege engineering (an artillerist) earns 25gp per month, so his daily construction rate would be 83cp per day. An entirely unskilled laborer has a daily construction rate of 1sp (10cp) per day.

See Domains at War: Campaigns for more details! This "construction rate" system is applied to everything from ships to ballista to castles.

Light Infantry Dodging Everything

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-domains-war-playtest/light-infantry-dodging-everything>

April 26, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Nerdnumber1 wrote:

Loose foot and loose mounted troops have the ability, at their option, to withdraw from ranged or melee combat, thereby reducing damage by the amount of hexes the move away (at least that is what the game seemed to imply, it wasn't very clear) up to their full marching movement.

My question is, what stops a careful, fast-moving loose-mounted unit (such as light infantry with marching movement of 4, iirc) from being near invincible while peppering the flanks of the enemy?

Hey there! Great question.

First, historically, a careful, fast-moving loose-mounted light infantry unit could destroy a heavy infantry unit by peppering it with hit-and-run attacks. The Battle of Lechaeum is a famous instance of this, one that taught the Greeks that they had to increase the proportion of light infantry in their armies. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Lechaeum

Many battles featuring heavy troops against horse archers demonstrated similar outcomes.

In terms of game mechanics, several factors make it difficult for a unit to actually do this.

- 1) Units cannot withdraw if they are disordered. A unit which withdraws becomes disordered. Therefore you can never withdraw from two consecutive attacks.
- 2) Units can only withdraw up to their marching movement. For light infantry, that is only 2 hexes. Heavy infantry can charge 3-4 hexes. For horse archers, that is 4 hexes. Sword-armed heavy infantry can charge 4 hexes, and heavy cavalry can charge 9 hexes. Thus it is impossible to withdraw outside of charge range without having blocking troops.
- 3) A heavy unit under fire from a light unit can defend in lieu of attacking (+2 to +4 AC), giving it a likely AC of 6 to 10. The light unit will hit on between 5% and 20% of its attacks, while depleting itself of ammo on 5% of its attacks. Before it destroys the heavy unit, it will likely run out of ammo.

So if you're playing a heavy force against a light force, you have two basic strategies. Either you can hunker down, wait for the enemy to get depleted, and then fight them in melee (where they will lose); or you can attempt to whittle down their force by disordering them, and hitting them again while disordered, either with good troop placement or lucky initiative rolls.

Availability of Labor

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-domains-war-playtest/availability-labor>

April 30, 2013

Tag: Q&A

James C. Bennett wrote:

Forgive me if I just missed this somewhere, but how do you determine how many laborers are available in an area? The construction rules list the availability of skilled laborers and master craftsmen based on the the number of available laborers, but I don't see the availability of laborers list in any of the ACKS books.

The sources of unskilled laborer are stated on p.30: "Unskilled laborers might be peasants, slaves, prisoners, conscripts, or even mercenaries on labor detail."

In other words, it's up to the leader to source his unskilled laborers anywhere he can! He can uses prisoners, buy slave laborers, etc.

To improve clarity: "When levying peasants to serve as laborers, apply the the same limits and effects as when levying peasants into a militia."

Nerdnumber1 then wrote:

I assume having dedicated craftsman/laborers/engineers in your army requires you to consistently pay their monthly, even when you don't have a job for them. Do they require hazard pay for traveling with the army, even if they aren't on the front line? Is their much precedent for having craftsman in an leader's permanent employ for military actions?

The rules don't require that you pay them hazard pay, no. You certainly could do so if you wanted to.

Armies definitely retained craftsmen in permanent employ during the classical era, and sometimes during the medieval era.

How Many Noncombatants Can Fit In a Stronghold

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-domains-war-playtest/how-many-noncombatants-can-fit-stronghold>

May 07, 2013

Tag: **Q&A**

James C. Bennett wrote:

So, my players are already talking about trying to shelter the population of Cynidicea in their stronghold to spare them from suffering at the hands of the Zargonian beastmen. The D@W rules show me how to calculate how much the stronghold can store in the way of provisions (way more than they need to feed their troops), and how many soldiers can defend it (way more than they have). Is there a way to calculate how many noncombatants can take shelter there?

I would say that you can more-or-less can shelter as many civilians as you can feed. I am not aware of any historical literature in which peasants or civilians were excluded from a shelter due to space constraints - it's always due to food constraints.

Constantinople needed 30,000 men to defend it and could hold about 500,000 people easily. So the multiplier is at least 15x times the unit capacity.

Mercenaries Get Better With Gear?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/mercenaries-get-better-gear>

September 09, 2012

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

Ok, as I understand Mercs, you need to buy their gear to outfit them as well as pay for them to actually work for you.

But...if you take that same Light Foot, capture the gear of a Heavy Infantry and give it to him, he starts charging you more for the privilege.

Is that right?

Mercs come with gear appropriate to their type. If you hire Horse Archers, they have horses, and so on.

You can change their equipment, but just because you equip someone with new gear doesn't mean they can use the gear. Here's the exact rule from Domains at War:

"Not every [person] can qualify to become every type of troop. Some lack any talent with animals, and cannot become cavalry; others are nearsighted and cannot become archers, for instance.

Any conscript able-bodied enough to be conscripted in the first place can be trained to be light infantry. 50% of conscripts have the strength and stamina to be heavy infantry. 50% have the agility and vision to be slingers, bowmen or crossbowmen. Up to 25% have the skill and seat to be light cavalry and only two-thirds of those (17% of the total) to be medium cavalry. Longbowmen must be drawn from those with the strength of heavy infantry and vision of bowmen, so only 25% of conscripts can qualify. Horse archers must be drawn from those capable of being both bowmen and cavalry, so only 12% can qualify. Heavy cavalry must be drawn from those capable of being both heavy infantry and medium cavalry, so only 8.5% can qualify. Cataphract cavalry must be drawn from those capable of being heavy infantry, bowmen, and medium cavalry, so only 5% can qualify."

"Training troops takes time, ranging from one month for light infantry to a full year for cataphract cavalry. During this time, the leader who levied the troops incurs costs for ammunition, training gear, marshals, and so on (see the [Military Specialists](#) section of this chapter for information on marshals). He must also provide for the equipment for the troops. The Training and Equipment Time and Cost table shows the time and cost to train various troop types. Trained conscripts have the same characteristics as mercenaries of their type. They must be paid wages appropriate to their troop type."

With this in mind, let's consider the case where Joe Mercenary, a light infantry, is equipped with chainmail, shield, and sword, giving him the equipment of heavy infantry. Let's assume Joe Mercenary is among the 50% of light infantry who can qualify as heavy infantry and he receives adequate training. Since the value of the equipment he's been provided is (40gp+10gp+10gp) 60gp while the difference in wages is (12gp-6gp) 6gp per month, I'd say that Joe Mercenary would be willing to work for his old wages (6gp) for ten months in exchange for the provision of the equipment.

Slippery_Chicken then wrote:

Do the qualifications you mentioned (Strength and stamina, skill and seat, etc.) correspond to ability scores or proficiencies in any way? Could a straight-3s character be a suitable cataphract cavalryman? If not, where is the line drawn?

It's funny you brought this up, because it was an issue I was just dwelling on myself as I work on final drafts for D@W. I think the answer, for simplicity, is going to be "no".

ACKS assumes that...

1. All PCs, regardless of STR and CON, are able to carry heavy loads for long periods of time, and can do so without permanently injuring their bones, tendons, or muscles.
2. All PCs, regardless of STR and CON, are able to ride animals for long periods of time, and can do so without enormous inflammation of their thighs, blisters, bruises, and so on.
3. All PCs, regardless of WIS or CHA, have the stoicism and intestinal fortitude to embrace pain, hardship, and suffering and to undergo excruciating suffering in pursuit of their goals. ("Sure, we'll wade through this leech-infested quicksand to get through to the treasure!")
4. All PCs, regardless of DEX, have human senses in the normal range.
5. All PCs, regardless of WIS, have no difficulties maintaining self-discipline and following orders when they want to.

In other words, in the interests of *player* agency, ACKS assigns PCs a relatively super-human level of *character* agency. ACKS characters never gain weight because they can't resist carbs, unless that's what the player wants.

These are obviously all false assumptions when applied to the gross pools of humankind, and it's these assumptions that the 50/25/12/6% rules are intended to address. The difference between a Light Infantry and Heavy Infantry NPC may not be his STR or CON stat, but rather his personal willingness to endure the discipline of formation fighting and his pain tolerance to bear the strain of the breastplate for hours on end.

One certainly could try to model all sorts of stat bonuses or penalties for different troop types, but I think it ends up causing more problems than it does benefit the game, particularly as it creates a discontinuity with Fighter PCs who don't have such bonuses or penalties. It also makes ability scores more important and ACKS tries to avoid the ability-scores-uber-alles vibe.

Mercenaries of Antiquity

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/mercenaries-antiquity>

May 15, 2013

Tag: **New Material**

Kiero wrote:

As people are probably aware by now, I'm planning to use ACKS for a historical game. The mercenaries table is therefore much simpler, but also needs amendment to fit what sorts of things were around. The big thing is that there was a lot less armour in evidence, and what there was, was lighter.

This replaces the Mercenary Troop Types on p52:

Light Infantry (javelins, dagger, small shield) - 30

Slingers (sling, dagger, small shield) - 30

Archers (shortbow, dagger) - 30 - Availability as Bowmen

Medium Infantry (javelins, spear/shortsword, leather, medium shield) - 45 - Availability as Bowmen

Heavy Infantry (pike/spear, shortsword, lamellar, small/large shield) - 60

Elite Archers (composite bow, shortsword, leather, small shield) - 75 - Availability as Longbowmen

Light Cavalry (lance/javelins, sword, medium shield, light warhorse) - 150

Horse Archers (composite bow, shortsword, hide, light warhorse) - 225

Medium Cavalry (lance/javelins, sword, leather, small shield, medium warhorse) - 225

Heavy Cavalry (lance, sword, lamellar, medium shield, heavy warhorse) - 300

Cataphract Cavalry (lance, sword, composite bow, lamellar, scale barded heavy warhorse) - 375

Costs are in drachmae per month. A drachma is a silver coin, everything is on the silver standard here. Furthermore, all prices are halved, which brings them pretty close to historical ones, so multiply gp values by 5 to get their drachma equivalent.

Obviously you'd vary equipment for regional styles. So Anatolian Light Infantry would have axes, where Celtic Light Infantry would have spears and medium shields. Celtic Medium Cavalry would have mail where Persian Medium Cavalry would have scale and a composite bow instead of javelins.

Melee Troops

Mercenary Type	Historical Examples	AC	Enc	Move	Form
Unarmored Infantry (5 javelins)	Helot	0	5/6	120	LF
Unarmored Infantry (club, shield)	Aestii Tribesman	1	1 1/6	120	LF
Unarmored infantry (2 javelins, sword, shield)	Thracian peltast with machaira, pelta, and javelins	1	1 3/6	120	LF
Unarmored Infantry (2 javelins, sword, shield, light helmet)	Mercenary peltast	1	1 3/6	120	LF
Unarmored Infantry (3 javelins, short sword, shield, light helmet)	Roman velite with javelins, gladius, round wicker shield Spanish caetrati	1	1 4/6	120	LF
Unarmored Infantry (5 javelins, shield)	Thracian peltast with pelta and javelins	1	1 5/6	120	LF
Unarmored Infantry (spear, sword, shield)	Indian infantry with bamboo spear, broadsword and hide shield Celtic infantryman, Chauci Noble, Visigothic Warrior	1	2 1/6	120	LF
Unarmored Infantry (spear, sword, hand axe, shield)	Frankish warrior	1	2 2/6	120	LF
Unarmored Infantry (spear, 3 javelins, shield, light helmet)	Phrygian spearman with spear, javelins, wicker shield and helm Later Greek Peltast with short spear, wicker shield, javelins, and Thracian helmet Chatti Warrior with framea, javelins, shield (no helmet)	1	2 3/6	120	LF

Light infantry (sword, shield, disc plate and greaves <i>equivalent to leather</i> , light helmet)	Etruscan warrior	3	3 1/6	120	LF
Light Infantry (spear, short sword, shield, leather armor, light helmet)	Early Greek hoplite with doru, xiphos or kopis, hoplon, linothorax, and bell helmet Late Greek hoplite after Iphicrates' Reforms	3	4 1/6	120	FF
Light Infantry (spear, 3 javelins, short sword, shield, leather armor, light helmet)	Later Macedonian Peltast with short spear, large shield, javelins, linothorax, and Thracian helmet	3	4 4/6	120	LF
Medium Infantry (2 javelins, shield, triple disc breastplate and greaves <i>equivalent to scale</i>)	Samnite with 2 javelins, scutum, triple-disc breastplate, greaves, and light helmet	4	4 2/6	120	LF
Medium Infantry (spear, short sword, shield, scale armor)	Persian hoplite with short thrusting spear, hoplon, xiphos, and scale corselet	4	5 1/6	90	FF
Medium Infantry (spear, javelin, short sword, shield partial breastplate with greaves <i>equivalent to scale</i> , light helmet)	Roman hastati with heavy pila, light pila, gladius, scutum, partial breastplate and greaves, and Montefortino helmet Spanish scutarii with spear, saunion, gladius, scutum, partial breastplate and greaves and helmet	4	5 2/6	90	FF
Medium Infantry (2 javelins, sword, shield, chain mail armor, light helmet)	Imperial Roman auxiliary with 2 lancea, spatha, pugio, scutum, and chainmail armor	5	5 3/6	90	LF
Medium Infantry (3 javelins, short sword, shield, chain mail armor, light helmet)	Imperial Roman auxiliary with 3 pila, gladius, pugio, scutum, and chainmail armor	5	5 4/6	90	LF

Medium Infantry (spear, javelin, short sword, dagger, shield, chain mail armor, light helmet)	Marian Roman legionary with heavy pila, light pila, gladius, pugio, scutum, lorica hamata, and Montefortino helmet	5	6 2/6	90	FF
Heavy Infantry (2 javelins, short sword, shield, banded plate armor, light helmet)	Imperial Roman legionary with 2 pila, gladius, scutum, Lorica Segmentata, and Imperial-Gallic helmet	6	6 3/6	90	FF
Heavy Infantry (spear, short sword, shield chain mail armor with metal greaves <i>equivalent to banded, light helmet</i>)	Roman triarii with hasta, lorica hamata with two greaves, and Etrusco-Corinthian helmet Carthaginian infantry with captured Roman equipment	6	7 1/6	60	FF
Heavy Infantry (spear, sword, shield, banded plate armor)	Late Imperial Roman Palatine legionary with lancea, spatha, shield, "glittering and shining armor", light helmet	6	7 1/6	60	FF
Heavy Infantry (pole arm, dagger, shield, lamellar armor, and light armor)	Macedonian phalangite with sarissa, linothorax reinforced with metal scales and greaves, and Thracian helmet	6*	7 1/6	60	FF
Heavy Infantry (spear, sword, shield, lamellar armor, and light helmet)	Macedonian hypaspist with doru, xiphos or kopis, hoplon, linothorax reinforced with metal scales and greaves, and Thracian helmet Etruscan soldier with spear, gladius, round shield, linothorax reinforced with metal scales and greaves, and Negau helmet	6	7 1/6	60	FF
Heavy Infantry (spear, sword, shield, lamellar armor, and heavy helmet)	Greek hoplite with doru, xiphos or kopis, hoplon, linothorax reinforced with metal scales and greaves, and Corinthian helmet	6	7 1/6	60	FF

Heavy Infantry (spear, sword, shield, partial plate armor <i>equivalent to banded</i> , and light helmet)	Etruscan soldier with spear, kopis, hoplon, muscle cuirass with greaves, and Attic helmet	6	7 1/6	60	FF

*Assumes that shield can be used with pole-arm. Otherwise 5.

60' move = 1 / 2; 90' move = 2 / 3 if LF, 1 / 3 if FF; 120' move = 2 / 4

Missile Troops

Mercenary Type	Historical Examples	AC	Enc	Move	Form
Unarmored Composite Bowman (composite bow, back-up bow)	Scythian bowman	0	3/6	120	LF
Unarmored Longbowman (longbow, sword)	Indian longbowman with bamboo longbow and broadsword	0	1 2/6	120	LF
Unarmored Bowman (short bow, spear, club)	Ethiopian with palm-wood bow, stone-tipped arrows, club, and horn-tipped spear	0	1 3/6	120	LF
Unarmored Bowman (short bow, battle axe, shield)	Gallic archer with short bow, axe, and buckler	1	1 3/6	120	LF
Unarmored Composite Bowman (composite bow, dagger, shield)	Scythian bowman	1	1 3/6	120	LF
Unarmored Slinger (sling, short sword, shield, light helmet)	Rhodian slinger with sling, small shield, light helmet	2	2 3/6	120	LF
Bowman (short bow, short sword, leather armor)		2	2 3/6	120	LF
Slinger (sling, short sword, shield, leather armor, light helmet)		3	3 3/6	120	LF
Medium Composite Bowman (composite bow, short sword, dagger, partial lamellar armor <i>equivalent to chain</i> , light helmet)	Trajanic archer with composite bow, gladius, pugio, metal scale corselet, and Eastern helmet	4	4 4/6	120	LF

Longbowman (long bow, sword, chainmail)		4	5 2/6	90	LF
Crossbowman (arbalest, short sword, chainmail)		4	5 2/6	90	LF
Medium Composite Bowman (composite bow, spear, short sword, shield, partial lamellar armor <i>equivalent to chain</i>)	Persian Immortal with composite bow, spear, short sword, gerron, and metal scale corselet	5	5 4/6	90	LF

An ancient/medieval arrow weighed between 500 and 1,500 grain. Assume 1,000 grain. 20 arrows is therefore 20,000 grain or 3 pounds. A quiver is thus much less than a stone, an adequately characterized as “one item”.

Cavalry Troops

Mercenary Type	Historical Examples	AC	Enc	Move	Form
Unarmored Cavalry (7 javelins, light warhorse)	Thessalian cavalryman with javelins	0/2 1	16 1/6	240'	LM
Unarmored Cavalry (lance, shield, light warhorse)	Numidian light cavalryman	1/2 2	17	240'	LM
Unarmored Cavalry (lance, sword, shield, light helmet, medium warhorse)	Ostrogothic cavalryman with spear, sword, chainmail hauberk and helmet				
Light Cavalry (lance, sword, shield, leather armor, light warhorse)		3/2 3	19 1/6	240'	LM
Light Cavalry (3 javelins, battle axe, leather armor, light warhorse)	Persian light cavalry with javelins, quilted cuirass, and one-handed battle axe	2/2 2	17 4/6	240'	LM
Light Cavalry (3 javelins, sword, shield, leather armor, light helmet, light warhorse)	Imperial Roman scutarii with javelins, spatha, scutarii shield, and helmet on light warhorse	3/2 3	17 5/6	240'	LM

Horse Archer (composite bow, spear, shield, leather armor, light warhorse)	Hun cavalryman	3/2 3	19 2/6	240'	LM
Horse Archer (composite bow, 2 short swords, light warhorse)	Parthian horse archer	0/2 1	15 4/6	240'	LM
Horse Archers (composite bow, scimitar, leather armor, light warhorse)		2/2 2	17 3/6	240'	LM
Horse Archers (composite bow, 3 javelins, partial lamellar armor <i>equivalent to chain</i> , light helmet, light warhorse)	Mede cavalryman with metal scale corselet only, bronze helmet, composite bow, and javelins	4/2 3	19 5/6	240'	LM
Medium Cavalry (lance, sword, shield, chain mail armor, light helmet, medium warhorse)	Gallic cavalryman with Celtic spear, long Celtic sword, scutum, chainmail hauberk, and Agen helmet Ostrogothic elite cavalryman with spear, sword, chainmail hauberk and helmet	5/2 4	21 1/6	180'	FM
Medium Cavalry (20 darts, spear, sword, shield, chain mail armor, light helmet, medium warhorse)	Roman auxiliary cavalry with light javelins, lancea, spatha, round shield, chain mail hauberk, light helmet, medium warhorse	5/2 4	21 5/6	180'	FM
Medium Cavalry (lance, sword, shield, lamellar armor, light helmet, medium warhorse)	Roman Imperial cavalry with kontos, sword, round shield, lamellar armor, and light helmet on medium warhorse	6/2 4	22 1/6	180'	FM
Medium Cavalry (lance, sword, partial plate armor <i>equivalent to lamellar</i> , light helmet, medium warhorse)	Macedonian companion cavalry with xyston, sword, bronze cuirass, pteruges, and horse. (no shields)	5/2 4	21 1/6	180'	FM
Heavy Cavalry (5 javelins, short sword, lamellar armor, light helmet, lamellar barded medium warhorse)	Persian proto-cataphract with metal scale corselet, pteruges, and leg protectors, with large Medean horse with bronze scale barding	5/7 6	26	180'	FM

Heavy Cavalry (lance, sword, shield, plate armor, heavy helmet, lamellar barded medium warhorse)	Roman clibanarii with kontos, sword, shield, lamellar armor over chain, and full helmet with mask on medium warhorse with lamellar barding	7/7 7	28 1/6	180'	FM
Cataphract Cavalry (composite bow, lance, sword, lamellar armor, light helmet, medium warhorse)	Sarmatian medium cavalry with composite bow, kontos, sword, lamellar armor, and light helmet on medium warhorse (no shields)	5/2 4	21 3/6	180'	FM
Cataphract Cavalry (composite bow, lance, sword or battle axe, chainmail armor, chainmail barded medium warhorse)	Parthian cataphract with composite bow, kontos, sword or axe, mail armor, on horse with mail barding (no shields)	4/6 5	24 3/6	180'	FM
Cataphract Cavalry (composite bow, lance, shield, sword or mace, chain, lamellar barded medium warhorse)	Sassanid cataphract with composite bow, kontos, sword or mace, shield, chain mail armor, on horse with metal scale barding (no shields)	5/7 6	26 2/6	180'	FM
Cataphract Cavalry (composite bow, lance, sword or battle axe, lamellar armor, lamellar barded medium warhorse)	Parthian cataphract with composite bow, kontos, sword or axe, metal scale armor, on horse with metal scale barding (no shields)	5/7 6	26 3/6	180'	FM
Cataphract Cavalry (composite bow, lance, sword, shield, plate armor, heavy helmet, lamellar barded medium warhorse)		7/7 7	29 1/6	180'	FM

You can estimate wage as (cost of equipment) + (cost of training) / UNIT DIVISOR.

Unit Divisor is 15 for Light Infantry and Slingers, 12.5 for Cataphracts, 11 for Heavy Infantry and Heavy Cavalry, 10 for Bowman, Light Cavalry, and Medium Cavalry, 9 for Crossbowman and Horse Archers, and 8 for Longbowman.

Remember that infantry are assumed to have 45gp in standard kit and cavalry have 80gp in standard kit above the listed weapons. (Exact equipment list is in D@W.)

EXAMPLE:

Horse Archer has Composite Bow (40gp), Short sword (7gp), Shield (10gp), Leather Armor (20gp), Light Warhorse (150gp), Cavalry Kit (80gp), Ammo (1gp), and 85gp in training (again, see D@W), for a total of 393gp. $393 / 9 = 43.6 \sim 45$.

If you then decided to equip the Horse Archers with Lamellar Armor (50gp instead of 20gp) and Leather Barding (40gp), cost would go up to 463gp, which would raise the wages to 51.4, ~ somewhere between 50 and 55gp.

Or, another way to think about it, for most units, every 10gp in equipment changes monthly wage by about 1gp. Heavy infantry in chain instead of banded? 11gp/month. Plate instead of banded? 13gp/month. Note that in most cases it's not really worth worrying about.

This isn't actually how I *calculated* the wages for these units (that's a spreadsheet with a lot of factors, and even then it has been manually adjusted in places based on actual play experiences) but it's worthwhile as a rule-of-thumb.

D@W Campaigns - Equipment Costs and Training Costs

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-domains-war-playtest/dw-campaigns-equipment-costs-and-training>

August 08, 2013

Tag: Q&A

James C Bennett wrote:

My players are trying to equip and train some conscripts. I am trying to figure out how many they can get equipment for in one month.

On the Training and Equipment Time and Cost table in D@W Campaigns, it says that equipping a light infantryman costs 85gp.

In the Mercenaries section, it says that a light infantryman has the following equipment [I've added the cost of the equipment from the tables in ACKS Core and D@W Campaigns]: 3 javelins [3gp], short sword [7gp], shield [10gp], leather armor [20gp], military tunic [1gp], cloak [1gp], pair of sandals [0.4gp], backpack [2gp], laborer's tools [9gp], 4 stakes and mallet [3gp], mess kit [3gp], small tent [3gp], 2 wool blankets [4gp], and waterskin [0.6gp].

That equipment costs a total of 67gp. Why is that less than the Equipment Cost on the Training and Equipment Time and Cost table? What does that extra amount represent? There are similar discrepancies for heavy infantry, bowmen, and longbowmen.

I ask because I was going to base the availability of "conscript equipment packages" on the price of the most expensive single item in the package.

Also, I see there is a column for "Training Cost". What does this represent? Does it include the recruit's wages for that time, or is that a separate expense?

James:

The military tunic is identical to the armiger's tunic from ACKS, and costs 20gp. The substantial expense is intended to represent high-quality uniforms that can survive in the field and/or changes of clothes.

That yields a price for the kit, excluding armor and weapons, of $(20+1+0.4+2+9+3+3+3+4+0.6)$ 46gp. I rounded the price of the standard kit from 46gp to 45gp for ease, justified on the assumption there'd be some efficiencies from a standard kit.

Training cost is the recruit's wages during training.

Constructs, Undead, and Similar

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-domains-war-playtest/constructs-undead-and-similar>

September 21, 2013

Tag: Q&A

bobloblah wrote:

After the close read of D@W: Campaigns I just did, I was left wondering about a few things in relation to creatures such as Undead and Constructs, or any similar non-living troops. In particular, there are no differences under the rules for strategic movement or supply for these types of troops who need neither food nor rest. Any chance we can see something to address this?

The reason ghouls and vampires are singled out is that in ACKS' default cosmogony they are the only types of undead that must feed. I don't explain this anywhere except in the unpublished Auran Empire setting, but for those who are interested...

WHAT IS UNDEATH?

Undeath can be thought of as a blight, corruption, impurity, or taint of the Logos. Undeath blocks the natural process of reincarnation from occurring. Either or both the body (form) and soul can be tainted with undeath, and the taint can be spread from tainted creature to creature.

When the body of a living creature becomes tainted by undeath, the soul within is trapped in the impure body upon its death. Ghouls, mummies, and vampires have tainted bodies. Tainted bodies are no longer truly alive and in the absence of magic or physical means of preservation, they rot. Ghouls magically maintain their bodies by feeding on the flesh of the living, vampires by feeding on their blood. Mummies do not feed, so great care is made to physically preserve the body before undeath.

When the soul of a living creature becomes tainted by undeath, the condition of the body is less important; the soul itself is unable to enter the cycle of reincarnation. Wights, wraiths, spectres, and vampires all have tainted souls. Undead with tainted souls are greatly feared, for their chilling touch spreads the corruption of their soul. Once tainted, an affected creature is greatly weakened, as the tainted portion of its soul works against the pure portion that remains.

CharlesDM then wrote:

I don't think Undead and Constructs should necessarily have a strategic movement advantage. I'd envision an army of skeletons and zombies on the march as being more akin to a cattle drive than [pick your favorite historical example of a fast moving army]. Of course, campaigns/Judges may differ.

I think you are right that undead would have certain strategic advantages that the rules overlook. However, they would also have strategic disadvantages that the rules overlook.

Consider:

1. Skeletons and zombies are mindless. It is hard enough to get an army of soldiers who can actually think for themselves to go where they are supposed to. Skeletons and zombies would need to be "herded" (as pointed out above) and this suggests a slower average movement rate.
2. Think about shoes. In every army, maintaining footgear for soldiers has been essential. It's so important that a large part of military discipline is devoted to footwear maintenance (shoe shining and inspections). Zombies are dead, rotting humans who don't heal. In the absence of shoes, their feet will be chewed up quickly. Yes, they can ignore pain. But they still can't walk fast if they're walking on stumps. Who is providing the shoes? Who is inspecting the zombies to make sure that they haven't mindlessly destroyed parts of their bodies on the march? It's not incorporeal or mindless undead.
3. Same goes for weapons. Skeletons fight with such implements. Swords need to be sharpened. Shields need to be repaired. Arrows need to be replenished. Who is doing this? It's not incorporeal or mindless undead.
4. Who is controlling the undead? If it's humans, those humans will themselves need rest. And control of undead (through turning) is not permanent. There need to be strategic pauses to re-control them by whichever clerics are doing it. Who is tracking the paperwork for which undead were controlled when? What happens if some slip?

Because of the above, I don't think it's unreasonable that most armies that include a portion of undead troops, with primarily human clerics controlling them, and humans supplying them, will therefore strategically maneuver more-or-less like a human army.

A purely undead army, controlled by a lich, with undead commanders and lieutenants, supplied by undead, would surely be able to ignore the penalties for moving without Rest and Recuperation, but would need special rules to deal with attrition, mindlessness, and other problems.

Against the 1%, or, a Robin Hood Rule

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/against-1-or-robin-hood-rule>

October 08, 2013

Tag: Q&A

koewn wrote:

Pillaging a domain is done on a per-family basis in the domain. Aside from the general population loss due to resistance, accidents, and less wholesome activities, where is the majority of that loot coming from?

There's a concept in Steven Erikson's Malazan series that the Malazan empire had often conquered domains via attrition of the nobility - the general population (and more to the point, the merchant class, who often aided and abetted this gambit) were spared at the expense of the nobility of the domain being looted and eliminated.

If one were to want to do the same - loot the stronghold and wealth of the domain ruler whilst leaving the remainder of the settlements and peasantry untouched (as much as possible) - where would one start?

Can we assume the majority of the loot is exactly that?

Or is there a way to take the "Pillaging Supply Bases" section, and between that, the supply cost value of the domain's garrison, and perhaps some metric based on starting wealth for advanced characters? An example domain I've been working on profits at 5,050 GP/month, averaging 11.6GP/family - I don't necessarily know what static NPCs should be spending their profits on, but some of that ought to be in a dungeon vault somewhere under the keep, or converted to luxury items.

Thanks for any ideas!

If you mathematically apply ACKS' assumptions to create a GDP for a society with a wealth distribution, it works out like this:

Lowest 78%: 20% of wealth
Next 15%: 10% of wealth
Next 5%: 20% of wealth
Next 2%: 15% of wealth
Next 0.5%: 12% of wealth
Next 0.25%: 8.25% of wealth
Next 0.1%: 6% of wealth
Next 0.03%: 4.5% of wealth
Top 0.01%: 4.25% of wealth

Or, simplified:

Lowest 78%: 20% of wealth
Middle 20%: 30% of wealth
Top 2%: 50% of wealth

Mass Urban Combat?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-domains-war-playtest/mass-urban-combat>

October 11, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Kiero wrote:

My historical game has reached an interesting stage; the PCs are intending to mobilize several hundred (around 200) citizens of Massalia and use them to roust out the criminal element in the docks.

They're aimed at one crime boss in particular, and his thugs will be prepared to resist. They'll be sectioning the docks and turning over various hideouts and wineshops, if they meet serious resistance they're supposed to call the city hoplites to bring in the heavies.

I'm wondering if there might be a way to structure this as a battle with D@W.

Thoughts?

How awesome! I could see several ways to run this fight:

1. If you want to use D@W: Campaigns, you could run it as a series of Assaults, with each section of the neighborhood being treated as a fortified structure. PCs could do heroic forays in the house-to-house fighting. The various Vagaries of Battle could be deployed easily here.
2. If you want to use D@W: Battles, I would do it at Platoon scale. Lay down a grid of 1-hex wide roads on the battle map, and then place 1-3 story fortified structures in each hex around the roads. The structures could have connections between them if they are part of larger buildings, or at the rooftop level for Assassin's Creed style rooftop bridges and so on.

#2 would take a lot of GM prep but it would probably be amazing.

Vassal Troop Wages

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-domains-war-playtest/vassal-troop-wages>

October 15, 2013

Tag: Q&A

koewn wrote:

Who pays the wages for troops sent up by a call to arms from a vassal? The original 'owner' of the troops, or the liege lord that called them up?

Supply, obviously, comes from the wager of the war. Wasn't sure if still paying that garrison was part of the 'duty' - I'm guessing not, but I can see thematic reasons (the wages of the garrison sent away being seen as an extra 'tax', marginally resembling things like the Crusades, etc.)

Thanks!

The original 'owner' of the troops pays the wages of the troops sent up.

The intent is that the mechanical effect of "Call to Arms" and "Special Tax" are more-or-less identical; the liege lord gets 1gp per family in value.

Frequency of Intelligence Gathering

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/frequency-intelligence-gathering>

October 23, 2013

Tag: Q&A

EHamilton wrote:

After reading the rules for recon rolls, I'm still uncertain exactly how often they need to be made. The weekly sequence given on page 53 indicates that, at the end of moving, each army makes a recon roll against all other hostile armies in range, and then all other armies in range make a roll back against it.

Two things I'm uncertain about:

1) If the movement system switches to day granularity, instead of weekly movement, does the recon roll procedure still only occur once per week, or does it switch to being made once per day?

My inclination is to say "keep recon rolls once per week", since it feels artificial to suddenly get seven times as much intelligence just because the granularity has changed. But taken literally, that's what the turn sequence seems to imply.

2) Does each army effectively get two rolls, once when it moves and then again when the other army moves, against the same army in the same week? Or does the fact that the roll has already happened that week preclude the need to make it again?

If you make two rolls in the same week and the first one is a Catastrophe, would the second roll keep giving the faulty intelligence of the first roll no matter what, or would it potentially replace the misinformation?

1) It switches to once per day against whatever force has caused your army to switch to daily movement.

2) Each army gets two rolls, once when it moves and once when the other army moves. The rolls are separate. Since the player character doesn't know if a roll is a catastrophe or a success, it is left to the PC to determine how to interpret the conflicting information he receives.

Range Check for Activations

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/range-check-activations>

November 26, 2013

Tag: Q&A

EHamilton wrote:

(1) Does the range check to see if a unit is within the ZOC of its commander occur at the start of the round, or at the moment that it is activated?

That is, can a unit with the commander move first in the division, and then have the rest of its unit follow it? Or does it have to wait and move last, so that the other division units that are activated are still within ZOC range when they take their moves?

It seems funny to me that leaders are effectively 'followers' who hold back to issue orders to the units that move ahead of them, but I think this is the most literal reading of the rules as far as I can tell.

(2) If playing with (possibly independent) heroes, what happens when a unit is destroyed (or routed) around its commander or some other embedded hero? Does the commander automatically survive and become independent? Does it matter if the hero is "capable of independence"? Do attacks beyond the damage needed to kill the unit "spill over" on the the hero? If so, can the hero retreat to avoid the damage?

(3) What does the "(U)" indicate on some battle rosters after the morale modifier, for the scenarios at the end of the chapter?

(1) Does the range check to see if a unit is within the ZOC of its commander occur at the start of the round, or at the moment that it is activated?

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APM: It is at the moment of activation. Thus the commander's unit will often be the last unit activated. Exceptional commanders like Alexander might lead the charge but most will order other units in first, like Julius Caesar.

APM: In general once a general committed himself to a charge, his ability to influence the battle in other places was sharply reduced so I don't think D@W's way of handling it is wrong.

(2) If playing with (possibly independent) heroes, what happens when a unit is destroyed (or routed) around its commander or some other embedded hero?

It depends on whether the command is capable of independence. If he is, then he becomes an independent hero. If not, then he is treated as non-hero under the basic rules.

Does the commander automatically survive and become independent? Does it matter if the hero is "capable of independence"?

Yes, see above.

Do attacks beyond the damage needed to kill the unit "spill over" on the the hero?

No.

If so, can the hero retreat to avoid the damage?

Irrelevant (see above)

(3) What does the "(U)" indicate on some battle rosters after the morale modifier, for the scenarios at the end of the chapter?

The U is for "Unpredictable".

How Much Treasure/XP for an Army?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/how-much-treasurexp-army>

November 26, 2013

Tag: Q&A

Tywyll wrote:

Due to some...complex circumstances my players are about to destroy/route an army of 3000 beastmen that have been devastating the fertile farm lands for months.

Now I kind of envisioned we'd use D@W to deal with it but more placed it there as a plot point so beyond their number and vague compositions I hadn't thought too much about it.

Next week however they will probably massacre said army with little risk to themselves in grand Old School fashion.

So how should I handle it xp wise...and how much loot should such an army have?

XP: The PCs should receive XP equal to

- 1) The XP value of casualties inflicted less XP value of casualties suffered by their forces
- 2) The GP value of spoils of war

Spoils of War: The spoils of war from a victorious battle are equal to one month's wages of each destroyed or routed unit. In addition, each prisoner captured is worth 40gp if sold as a slave or ransomed. (Higher level NPCs, monsters, and similar creatures can be ransomed for greater sums, at the Judge's discretion.)

Goblin wages are 3gp per month, orc wages are 6-12gp, hobgoblins 12-55, ogres 40-80.

Archers/Flyers Questions

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-domains-war-playtest/archersflyers-questions>

December 20, 2013

Tag: Q&A

EHamilton wrote:

For D@W Battles

1. Flyers effectively can declare that they are at elevation. Does that mean flyers always get the -4 to-hit modifier whenever archers attack them, and always get a +1 attack modifier when they attack? Or are those benefits already factored into their attack throws and AC?

2. Flyers usually ignore threat from non-flyer units. But they count as being in a threatened hex "when they attack" a unit on the ground. Obviously this makes a readied counterattack legal. But does that also mean that they have to formally disengage while moving in the next turn, by moving directly backward away from the unit and being limited to "marching" speed? Or can they just rise back into the air and move around the unit however they want?

3. Most missile attacks don't track ammo, using the "deplete ammo on a roll of 1" rule. Does this also apply to thrown weapons like spears or javelins, or should those be individually tracked? It seems like if you have only 3 javelins, there should be a much higher chance of running out of them!

1. No, the benefits are not factored into their attack throws and AC. A Flyer operating at elevation would get the -4 modifier when archers attack them and a +1 attack modifier when they attack with their own missile weapons.

2. They can just rise back into the air and move however they want. The Flyer is threatened only "when they attack", e.g. in the course of the attack sequence. A Flyer unit can only be threatened by an enemy Flyer or by an enemy unit conducting a reaction attack against the Flyer.

3. This is an issue I wrestled with during the game design. Ultimately I concluded that the "deplete ammo on a roll of 1" rule should apply to thrown weapons, even though the troops using them carry less than 20 ammunition. It has to do with how we simulate archery versus thrown weapons.

Javelineers were among the most popular and commonly employed light troops on their battlefield. If their effectiveness were really so limited as 1/7th the useful attacks of archers, it seems like this wouldn't be the case.

Moreover, we rarely find evidence in the historical records that javelineers ran out of javelins. We frequently find evidence in the historical records that archers ran out of arrows. And yet we know that archers carried 20+ arrows while javelineers carried 3-5 javelins.

So the effectiveness of javelineers relative to archers seemed like a historical puzzle. In deeper reading, I determined it was an issue of formations and tactics. Archers were generally employed using volley fire at medium-to-long range. The majority of the archers couldn't even see the targets they were shooting at, and were simply emulating the firing stance of their neighbors. From Sumer to Ancient Rome concludes that only the tiniest percentage (<1%) of arrows fired would have dealt damage to enemy. D@W assumes that when a bowman unit fires, ALL of the archers are attacking, with the first rank at normal effectiveness (getting 1 attack), and the 2nd-6th rank at about 20% effectiveness ($5 \times .2 = 1$ attack).

In contrast, javelins and other thrown weapons were usually discharged by the leading ranks of the light infantry, with direct fire aimed right at the enemy. As a result, when a javelin unit attacks, only the first two ranks are assumed to be attacking, both at normal effectiveness. The other four ranks will fire when they move to the front (or, more typically, when the leading ranks retire backwards).

And that's the answer to the ammo quandary, too. The archers are firing all their arrows with every attack, but only a portion of the javelineers are tossing their javelins with every attack. Relative ammo expenditure is such that the javelineers don't really run out of javelins faster than the archers run out of arrows.

A lot of this is hidden in the "deep structure" of D@W. (Have you ever wondered why a unit of 120 men gets 2 attacks per round even though normal men get 1 attack per round?)

Here is a simple thought experiment that explains it, more or less:

Melee Assumptions:

There are 20 men in the front row each with 1 HD

There are 6 ranks of men, for a total of 120 men

A hit in D@W represents a hit by 20 men

Each hit deals 1 HD of damage, killing 20 men

It should take 6 hits to kill a 1 HD unit

If the front row are the ones attacking, they should get 1 attack

Since units get 2 attacks, we know that the second rank is also attacking - either "poking through" or filling in the gaps.

Bow Assumptions:

There are 20 archers in the front row

There are 100 archers in the rear rows

A hit in D@W represents a hit by 20 arrows

Rear rank archers in the unit cannot even see actual enemies because they are in rear ranks

Rear rank fire is being aimed at an enemy formation, not at specific enemies

For each "hit" on a formation by the rear rank using plunging fire, only 20% of the arrows actually hit a target (From Sumer to Rome)

The number of attacks should be $(20/20) + (100/20 \times .2) = 1+1=2$

Sustained rate of fire (factoring in fatigue) was 6 arrows per minute per archer using volley fire, or 1 arrow per combat round

Crossbow Assumptions:

There are 20 crossbowmen in the front row, kneeling

There are 20 crossbowmen in the second row

There are 80 crossbowmen in the rear rows

Rear rank fire is being aimed at an enemy formation, not at specific enemies

For each "hit" on a formation by the rear rank using plunging fire, only 20% of the bolts actually hit a target (From Sumer to Rome)

A hit in D@W represents a hit by 20 bolts

Assume sustained rate of fire was 4 bolts per minute for crossbowmen or 2 shots every 3 combat rounds

The number of attacks should be $((20 \times 0.67)/20) + ((20 \times 0.67)/20) + ((80 \times 0.67/20) \times .2) = 0.67 + 0.67 + 0.53 = 1.87 \sim 2.0$

EHamilton then wrote:

[quote=archon]1. No, the benefits are not factored into their attack throws and AC. A Flyer operating at elevation would get the -4 modifier when archers attack them and a +1 attack modifier when they attack with their own missile weapons.[/quote]

To clarify: The rules on page 29 don't say that the +1 attack modifier for higher elevation applies exclusively to missile attacks, so I've been assuming that applies to melee too. Does that also apply to flyers who are swooping down to make a melee attack?

Or do they temporarily lose elevation (and the bonus) during a melee attack, and then gain it back the moment the attack finishes?

Or was the intent that this bonus only applies to missile attacks and never to melee attacks, even for non-flyers?

Thanks for the detailed survey of javelin-use literature!

You are correct; I mis-remembered my own rule. Flyers would gain +1 attack modifier for higher elevation for so long as they wish to remain elevated.

Stacking of Morale Bonuses

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-domains-war-playtest/stacking-morale-bonuses>

December 31, 2013

Tag: Q&A

EHamilton wrote:

Most fighter-types have some way to provide a +1 morale bonus to shock and morale checks. These roughly fall into three categories:

- A) Bonuses for troops commanded by a leader who hired them (e.g., fighter)*
- B) Bonuses for troops commanded by a leader who shares their fair (e.g., paladin)*
- C) Bonuses for troops inspired by a bardic recitation (e.g., elven courtier)*

Some questions:

1) Which of these effects can stack with one another? Can a unit get one effect from a lieutenant, one from a division commander, and one from a general?

*2) How many troops can the bard song ability affect (i.e., can I cram this entire brigade into a 50' radius)? Would it be kosher to use some kind of sound amplification magic to expand this radius? (Here I stop to visualize a massive outdoor performance with a speaker system based on **magic mouths**, **ventriloquism**, and a back-up **angelic choir**!)*

3) What does it mean to "hire" troops? Can a non-fighter character send off a fighter henchmen to recruit at a market -- so the henchmen provides the bonus, even if he isn't actually bankrolling the troops?

1. In D@W the morale bonus applies to the character's Morale Modifier. The troops will then benefit from the Morale Modifier of the officer attached to their unit for shock and morale rolls; and from half the Morale Modifier of their army general for morale rolls.

2. Each use of a bard song ability can affect 1 unit. If you want to allow concert-style theatrics, go for it!

3. Yes and no. Troops are hired by whoever pays their wages. It would certainly be possible to structure a relationship like you describe. However, the troops would then be loyal to the fighter (henchman) and not the PC. If the henchman were to fail a loyalty roll, the troops would go with him.

Provided that you follow the rules for henchmen loyalty (rolling for loyalty anytime there is a calamity, when the henchman perceives himself to be more powerful, etc) then all sorts of emergent gameplay will happen...

PS In the latest draft, if you look at the Watchful Legion, you'll see a situation where the second-in-command has substantially better Morale Modifier than the general. Presumably Artashamura wishes to retain his troops' loyalty directly rather than work through his minion.

Heroic Foray Aftermath

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/heroic-foray-aftermath>

July 07, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Aryxmaraki wrote:

I have found myself unable to be certain of what happens after a heroic foray is resolved.

Parts I understand: A hero stakes 1 BR and the Judge gives him 1 BR worth of creatures to fight. He proceeds to fight them and then either wins or loses.

If both sides have a heroic foray declared, each side gets their heroes + the amount of BR the opponent stakes. (If Aragorn stakes 1 BR and Sauron stakes 3, Aragorn gets 3 BR worth of creatures on his team and Sauron gets 1 BR.) Again, it gets fought until someone wins or loses.

Campaigns says that if the heroes win the foray, the opposing side loses units with BR equal to the BR staked in the foray.

The part I am unsure of: Is the loss of units a reminder to the Judge to take units off the board to reflect the slaughter that just happened? Or is it an additional penalty?

That is, if I stake 1 BR, and slaughter 120 light infantry (some of which were likely routed instead of actually dying, but for the purposes of the epic poem the party bard is writing, they all died), does the enemy army lose 1 unit of light infantry (the 120 guys I heroically slew)? Or do they lose 2 units of light infantry (the 120 killed, plus 1 BR of units for losing the heroic foray)?

In the case of an opposed foray, basically the same question; do you just take the units killed off the board, or take the units killed off and then remove an additional BR equal to the BR lost?

The loss of units is a rule/reminder to the Judge to take units off the board to reflect the slaughter that just happened.

It's like a currency conversion - you convert from BR to character-level threats, then back to BR.

nDervish then wrote:

The one thing I question about this rule is that it appears to be written as being all-or-nothing. If the heroes stake 2 BR and wipe out half the enemy force, but are then forced to leave the field (ultimately losing the foray), then shouldn't the opposing army be reduced by 1 BR even though they didn't win?

(I assume that's what's intended to happen, given that, under "Heroes vs. Heroes", "Each side loses units with a combined battle rating equal to the total BR their side lost in the foray.", but the rules for basic forays only say to remove enemy forces if the heroes win.)

The rule is all-or-nothing, yes.

It increases the stakes of the bidding, which is fun.

More importantly, it prevents the PCs from bidding high on BR in order to force the Judge to include some low-level beasties to "make his numbers", then quickly target those and leaving. E.g. bid 10 BR, blow a fireball to kick some goblins, exit the fight. Whereas if they had only bid 1 BR, the Judge might have confronted them 1 BR worth of elite ogres.

Conscripts From Urban Population?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/conscripts-urban-population>

July 11, 2014

Tag: **Q&A**

koewn wrote:

Working on a project, had a brainfarty sort of question:

Conscription (D@W:C, p14) specifically mentions peasant families, which I've taken to be a keyword for families out in the realm, not in urban settlements.

I am under the impression that means that urban families are left out of conscription or militia efforts - yes? (and they're assumed, as a population, to be something more than Joe Farmer, Peasant-At-Large)

Thanks!

The rules are not well-written in this regard, for which I apologize, because of the uncertainty of the phrase "peasant family".

A ruler can conscript and draw militia from urban families.

Recruitment of PC Classes?

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/recruitment-pc-classes>

July 05, 2014

Tag: Q&A

susan_brindle wrote:

How are classed soldiers recruited en masse? IE: If a king wants to create a unit of gryphon-riding wizards, where can I find the rules for recruiting large numbers of wizards? Do they just show up with the levy? Can they be trained from peasants by a wizard with the Manual of Arms skill, with the Judge reasoning that some percentage of each crop show magical potential? (and, naturally, if they're to ride gryphons, only the fraction of wizards who're good riders will qualify for further training)

Or do they work like mercenaries?

There are no rules for recruiting large numbers of wizards. By default, such units are assumed not to commonly exist.

The rules for 0-level characters becoming 1st level mages can be found here:

Magical Research: 0th level characters who study under an arcane spellcaster of 9th level or higher may become 1st level mages. To qualify they must first possess the Alchemy, Collegiate Wizardry, Magical Engineering, or related proficiency (Judge's discretion). They must then study for 1d6 months and make a proficiency throw of 14+, modified by their INT bonus or penalty. Success means the character advances to 1st level. Failure means the character has no gift for magic.

You could use those to build a bottom-up assessment. Let's assume that the qualifying men are roughly equal in demographic to the literate population in the Middle Ages, e.g. 10%. Let's assume an average +1 INT bonus. From this we can conclude 10% of conscripts might be mage-capable, and of those after 3 months, 40% (net 4%) will graduate.

Alternatively, you could create the unit in D@W and calculate its battle rating and monthly wages. Then you can estimate its likely availability to hire using the rules for Exotic Troops.

Nerdnumber1 then wrote:

Don't they need to have a mage to teach the would-be mages and aren't they somewhat limited in the number they can train at one time? Then again, the tower/apprentice rules for mages assumes the mage is doing his own research for the most part. I'm guessing raising a mage army involves more focus on training for both the mage and his existing apprentices.

Maybe it would be good to add a proficiency (or use manual of arms) to signify a mage who is specifically trained for teaching larger groups of students (multiplying the number of simultaneous students by a number, perhaps doubling per manual of arms proficiency?).

Yes, you'd need to have "mage trainers" and would have to place a limit on the number they can train at once, perhaps 12 each.

Pedagogy is a cool proficiency idea.

Nerdnumber1 then wrote:

Is there a level limit for the teachers? Do they have to be of strong-hold building level? If so, that really limits one's ability to raise a unit of casters (though that's probably intentional considering you specifically said that you wanted to avoid too much magic in your warfare).

Maybe this new magic pedagogy proficiency levels could reduce the level a character needs to be to train other mages, though probably also limiting the number of students one could train if under-leveled based on the level, the speed of instruction, or the chance of success. A magical academy might scrape together a unit in a few years or so, maybe?

I haven't made clear in the rules the minimum level required to teach ordinary men magic, though the implication is that it's 9th level. Individual Judges can adjust this to suit their particular campaign world.

Your ideas on the proficiency are good and worth testing out in play, for sure.

Fire Versus Army Rules

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/fire-versus-army-rules>

July 27, 2014

Tag: Q&A

SaruSama wrote:

I think this question makes more sense if i just explain the situation were in. Our group is trying to stop a small horde of beastmen from destroying a local town. We as the adventuring party went to scout and attempt to slow them down. We got to the first village they had taken and they had fortified it. The area is dry brush and the buildings/palisade is made of wood. They also appear to just have one source of water the local well. We ended the session in planning mode and my plan was to wait for a big wind and set a fire as close to encircling the village as much as possible. My first question is how would we roll this out? My other question is i looked online and couldn't find any examples of armies being destroyed by fire so I'm assuming theres some huge flaw to this plan that i don't understand, what would that be? Because as i look at it now if we start a brushfire that encircles the village i don't see how they survive? If it matters theres roughly 900 of the beastmen there. Thanks!

A few things come to mind.

1. In the absence of magic, the fire will not spread swiftly enough to alight the entire palisade. Therefore the beastmen, once they realize the danger, will be able to flee through a point that has not been set alight.
2. Even if the entire palisade is aflame, the beastmen might be able to put out the fires in one portion long enough to escape. Dirt can put out a fire as well as water, sometimes.
3. If the entire palisade catches flame, it is likely to destroy the village too. "It was necessary to destroy the village in order to save it". Are there any captives or hostages within?

ACKS Domains at War: Campaigns has rules for Arson during sieges. It's available on DriveThruRPG.

Domains at War: Playing to Officer Strengths

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/general-discussion/domains-war-playing-officer-strengths>

August 04, 2014

Tag: **Insight**

Nerdnumber1 wrote:

I was looking at my low level henchman group and saw that, should we get to high levels, my mage follower would have much better strategic skill (+4) than I do but a +0 morale bonus (my fighter is currently on track to about a +3 morale bonus and a 0~1 strategy bonus). While I understand this is intentional to make all classes able to participate in mass combat late game, I'm wondering what the best way to divide one's forces between high strategy, low morale and low strategy, high morale officers (as well as less extreme officers of course).

I'm thinking the general should be someone with a good enough leadership to give sufficient divisions as well as a high morale bonus to reduce morale rolls from making the entire army route. Looks like the mage isn't going to be general (though the recon rules require more strategy, so maybe they get the job then?)

Naturally, a higher morale unit like heavy infantry fighting in formation and a few lieutenants would soften the blow of low morale, but that means a unit that wants to march into combat, slowly (where my fighter wants to be anyway). Maybe give the mage a heavy infantry escort? That still hurts their normally good movement, however.

Ranged units might be better, since they don't need to move as much, but their morale is lower. I think the main question is thus: What units have the greatest need for high initiative? Moving first (or last, when necessary) can be a significant advantage, but how much of an advantage can vary a bit.

Any other thoughts or theories to share?

Difficult questions, indeed!

In my experience, you will prefer to have strategically skilled commanders on units that are fast, damaging, and expensive. First, a high initiative will allow those units to control the tempo of battle, engaging where and what they want to fight. Nothing is more painful than to watch a unit of cataphracts decimated because your low initiative roll kept them from getting out of an engagement in time. Second, such units tend to have higher base morale scores, so they have less need of an inspirational commander. Third, because these units are expensive, you will seek to avoid having them take casualties at all, whereas high morale is generally most useful in keeping units fighting when they take a lot of damage. (Most of the time, you WANT your cavalry to retreat fast and far!)

Conversely, you will prefer to have high morale commanders on units that are slow and cheap. Since the units are slow-moving, they will not be able to control who and where they fight in any case, so going first will generally not avail them much. Since the units are cheap, you will want them to absorb the brunt of the casualties, which means you'll want them to have commanders who can keep them fighting even when their are hurting. Most cheap units have bad morale scores, so this is double important.

One final note. There is a carefully-designed interplay between lieutenants, commanders, and generals. The most important characteristic for a lieutenant is his high morale modifier. Per the old adage, "a lieutenant shows his men how to die bravely".

The most important characteristic for a commander is a high strategic ability. If you have a commander with exceptionally good strategic ability, and lieutenants with good morale modifiers attached to his units, you will have a tough division.

Finally, your general should have both a high strategic ability AND morale modifier, if possible. The US Army recognizes this problem within its own office corps, by the way - the skills that make for a great platoon leader aren't necessarily those of a great battalion commander, and a great battalion commander may not be able to lead an army.

Nerdnumber 1 then wrote:

Interesting... I'm going to have to fit in some ranks of military strategy if I don't want to end up as a heavy infantry lieutenant! I know both are useful, but with random stats, sometimes a character is ill-equipped for a particular role, but then again, some historic leaders have found themselves thrust into role they were ill-equipped for! I wonder if it would be wise to put a henchman in the general's position and just act as a lieutenant with the common men, at the front of the line!

One quick question: To what extent can a leader take advantage of military advisement between battles? I imagine a leader who, while still intimately involved in command, understands that one of his advisers (henchmen) has skill in military strategy and thus heeds their advice where possible. Could this leader gain some benefit from their henchman's strategy rating for purposes of reconnaissance, counter-recon, countering hijinks, etc.?

Great question. This thread discusses a rule you might consider:

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/development-and-playtest/acks-domains-war-p...>

"An Adjutant assists a General or Commander in strategic planning. A General or Commander may substitute the Adjutant's Strategic Ability for his own. There is a -1 point penalty due to the inefficiencies of communication between command and staff."

This allows you to have the charismatic young General with the wise and experienced Adjutant.

Domains at War: Battles!

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/domains-war-battles>

July 05, 2014

Tag: Q&A

susan_brindle wrote:

First, let me say that I'm super thrilled to finally have my copy of Domains at War. I'd been anticipating this for a long time, and I think it's the only rulebook I've ever sat down and read in one sitting. I am wholly delighted with your product, as I hoped I would be.

I'm very excited to flood your forum with questions once again!

1. If casualties are determined based on UHP lost at the end of the battle, and a unit receives healing, does that prevent the losses? IE: I have a unit of trolls. My trolls get flanked by heavy cavalry and take 10 UHP (and pass their morale checks for taking 1/3rd of their UHP in damage) and then the battle drags on for 9 more rounds, so the trolls are only down by 1 at the end. Does that mean I lose almost none of them?

2. Under the viable targets for melee attacks, it says I should attack someone who wasn't attacked this round if possible. I'm assuming that that "if possible" only refers to if multiple targets are threatened? IE:

My unit, Troll A, is threatening Elven Longbowmen A and B. My unit Troll B is threatening only Longbow B. If I activate Troll A first, he can attack Longbow B. If I then activate Troll B, he can still attack Longbow B, because that's his only eligible target. Had I activated Troll B first, Troll A would've been forced to attack Longbow A, because he had a choice.

*3. So, as I understand it, there's no upper limit to how many units can be in a division, but there is a limit to how many units can be *useful* within a division, correct? IE: A general might assign 30 units of trolls to his warchief commander, but if that chief only has 5 Leadership, then 25 units of trolls will simply stand around on any given turn. Even fewer, if the chief wants to activate trolls who get disordered or go out of range.*

4. Also, "A general performs all the functions of a commander" means he commands a division, right? So an army with three divisions will have one general and two commanders?

5. Can voluntary and involuntary retreat stack?

IE:

A unit of loose foot humans are flanked by some trolls and take 4 damage. They choose to retreat 2 hexes (their full marching speed) to reduce that to 2 damage. 2 is still more than half their UHP, so they check shock. They get a 10, modified to 5 (-1 light infantry morale, -2 disordered, -2 below half) which means they flee another 4 hexes backwards, meaning that they moved 6 hexes on the enemy turn.

6. Units can't retreat through units normally. Can a unit retreat through threatened hexes?

1. If casualties are determined based on UHP lost at the end of the battle, and a unit receives healing, does that prevent the losses? IE: I have a unit of trolls. My trolls get flanked by heavy cavalry and take 10 UHP (and pass their morale checks for taking 1/3rd of their UHP in damage) and then the battle drags on for 9 more rounds, so the trolls are only down by 1 at the end. Does that mean I lose almost none of them?

APM: That's correct. Casualties are assessed at the end of the battle.

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APM: That's correct. But remember that a general IS limited in how many division commanders he can have in his army. So when an army gets too big, it can become a command-and-control nightmare! For a historical example, see the Battle of Gaugamela, in which a large portion of the Persian infantry stand around and do nothing for most of the battle!

4. Also, "A general performs all the functions of a commander" means he commands a division, right? So an army with three divisions will have one general and two commanders?

APM: That's correct.

5. Can voluntary and involuntary retreat stack?

IE: A unit of loose foot humans are flanked by some trolls and take 4 damage. They choose to retreat 2 hexes (their full marching speed) to reduce that to 2 damage. 2 is still more than half their UHP, so they check shock. They get a 10, modified to 5 (-1 light infantry morale, -2 disordered, -2 below half) which means they flee another 4 hexes backwards, meaning that they moved 6 hexes on the enemy turn.

APM: Yes they can stack. A unit's Marching speed does not represent its full movement capability. A unit doing both a voluntary and involuntary retreat is in considerable disarray and moving at something more like a vaguely chargish speed....

6. Units can't retreat through units normally. Can a unit retreat through threatened hexes?

APM: Yes, it can.

susan_brindle then wrote:

So, we got halfway through the example battle before tragedy struck, but it generated two new questions.

1. Can Readied attacks allow for melee attacks "through" allies? That is, the text states that a reaction attack can be made as long as the reacting unit is either being attacked or adjacent to the unit being attacked, but not that the reacting unit actually be threatening the attacker's hex.

My instinct is that this feels very strange and that I must be missing something; my player argued that it could represent that unit moving forward to defend their comrades.

2. Does a Loose unit's voluntary damage-reducing retreat provoke an advance from Irregular units? I'm assuming it does.

1. You were correct and your player was incorrect.

After you determine eligibility to perform a reaction attack, you then follow the steps in the attack sequence starting with Declare Method of Attack. The requirements in that step will preclude a melee attack against a target the unit does not threaten.

2. Yes. In fact, this is one of the best tactics to use when dealing with beastmen...

The introductory scenario, which pits the Aurans versus the Beastmen, should give you a sense of how things work. Beastmen are faster, stronger, and tougher than human troops - so you only can beat them by exploiting their command and control flaws. It's worth playing that scenario a few times to get the hang of things.

susan_brindle then wrote:

It was actually while playing that scenario that questions kept arising!

Out of curiosity, what was the rationale behind the rules for ranged units? That is, why are they limited to only attacking the nearest eligible enemy, and why can't they fire into melee? I recognize that few commanders would be callous enough to risk friendly fire, but incredibly callous commanders are a hallmark of fantasy!

1. Whatever we say about callous commanders in history, player-commanders are always more callous. A tactic that is rare and borderline will become commonplace.

2. The tactic would rarely be useful. Given the arc of plunging fire, the configuration of typical armor/shields, and the formation of fighting troops, arrows fired from behind friendly lines into a fight would disproportionately strike the unshielded rear of the friendly units, and not the armored and shielded front of the enemy.

3. It makes the game less fun if you allow callous fire-into-melee. Rather than reward proper tactics (firing missile units before melee to soften up and disorder the opposition), it rewards high-HP units that charge right into the enemy and then attrit them with missile fire on top of that.

susan_brindle then wrote:

Can the victorious army collect monster parts, and if so, is this factored into the collected wealth?

Given that an orc's monthly wages are only 6 or 9 gold, this would represent a substantial boost in spoils of war for my party that just defeated a half-thousand beastmen. (Even if most of them were merely routed, that's still an easy 2-3k extra)

What a delightful question! No, monster parts are not already factored in. I would say that you could collect monster parts, yes, although I don't know if I'd allow full value. Some of the corpses will be rotten, mangled, or ruined; others will be messed up by soldiers unskilled in the monster-part collection process; the market price might go down from flooding it....

DAW: Battles Questions

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/daw-battles-questions>

September 01, 2014

Tag: Q&A

Beragon wrote:

I've played the sample scenarios 1 1/2 times solo so far, and questions have arisen. So far, the orcs have kicked the empire's % ^#.

1) Irregular units must always attack if able to do so:

– Does this include charging if they are able to?

– I assume that the irregular unit may attack with any type of attack available to them (for example the orc crossbowmen can attack with their crossbows rather than advance to attack in melee)

2) When fleeing, is a unit able to move through two consecutive squares adjacent to enemy units? I had a situation where a unit of empire light cavalry was deep in orc territory, but unscathed and unthreatened. During the morale phase, they decided to flee. They must flee back toward their own side, but this would require them to go through several hexes that would violate the above rule.

1. Irregular units must always attack if able to do so:

1a) Does this include charging if they are able to?

No. The rule applies after movement is completed.

The rule's general intent is to force irregulars to attack and thereby trigger reaction attacks when a more disciplined force would do so. For example, if veteran elven longbowmen are ready to fire, it might be unwise for goblin slingers to fire on them...but if they are able to do so, they must do so. If orc infantry have just charged forward and find themselves adjacent to readied heavy cavalry they might not want to attack and suffer the devastating reaction attack, but they have to.

1b) I assume that the irregular unit may attack with any type of attack available to them (for example the orc crossbowmen can attack with their crossbows rather than advance to attack in melee)

Yes.

2) When fleeing, is a unit able to move through two consecutive squares adjacent to enemy units? I had a situation where a unit of empire light cavalry was deep in orc territory, but unscathed and unthreatened. During the morale phase, they decided to flee. They must flee back toward their own side, but this would require them to go through several hexes that would violate the above rule.

Yes. Fleeing units do not have to obey that rule.

The limit on moving through two consecutive squares adjacent to enemy units was designed to prevent cavalry from "skimming" along the rear and flank facing of enemy forces, or "wiggling" through them, in order to get to some specially chosen unit. This was a very "gamey" tactic in some early sessions of play.

I just re-read the text and did not make this clear in the rulebook. Apologies!

3. Correct.

Beragon then wrote:

Another question regarding "irregular units must attack if possible":

THE SITUATION:

It is Chief Awitar's initiative. He has his orc heavy infantry unit #6 adjacent to and threatening an enemy unit. However, unit #6 charged last round, thus it is currently disordered. Both crossbow units under his command also have eligible missile targets. Heavy infantry unit #7 fled last round (and thus is currently disordered).

THE QUESTION:

Chief Awitar wants to activate heavy infantry unit #7 and bring it back into the fight. Does the above rule prevent him from doing so? In other words, must he spend all 4 of his available APs on the units that can attack (2 to cause unit #6 to attack and 1 each on the crossbow units)?

No, it's nothing so complex as that.

The rule merely means that IF you activate an irregular unit then when the unit's attack sequence is reached, IF it can attack an enemy, it must do so.

It's just designed to prevent you from using irregular troops in very nuanced ways, like moving next to a unit that is ready but not attacking it, in order to avoid the moving unit being eligible to be struck by bow fire, say.

Artillery Ranges

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/ask-autarchs/artillery-ranges>

September 17, 2014

Tag: Q&A

nDervish wrote:

According to the Missile Weapon Ranges table on ACKS Core 103, composite and long bows have a maximum range of 210', crossbows 240', and arbalests 360'.

According to the Artillery Characteristics table on D@W: Campaigns 44, light and medium ballistas have a maximum range of 200' and heavy ballistas/light catapults 300'.

Is this accurate? If so, is it intentional that a common[1], easily-used[2], hand-held, man-portable weapon (the arbalest) should outrange every possible ballista? If so, what's the reasoning for it?

If arbalests have longer range, are more mobile, do roughly half as much damage per hit, have more than double the rate of fire, and can be operated by a single easily-trained soldier rather than a crew of several specialists, then what's the point of having a ballista? The only advantage I can see of a ballista over an arbalest is the ability to damage wood (med/heavy) or stone (heavy) structures - but, if those structures are guarded by crossbowmen, it's an irrelevant advantage because the ballista can't get close enough to attack the structure without first/also allowing the crossbowmen to fire on the ballista's crew.

(For the sake of completeness, I will also note that ACKS Core 112 lists the maximum range of ballistas as 200 yards rather than 200', but, according to ACKS Core 93, "all distances are measured in yards rather than feet in the wilderness... Weapon and spell ranges are measured in yards in the wilderness also", so the arbalest's maximum range is similarly increased to 360 yards when outdoors, keeping it greater than the maximum range of a ballista.)

[1] Despite the name, crossbowmen use arbalests as their default armament, per ACKS Core 52 and D@W:C 27.

[2] Per the description of Manual of Arms on ACKS Core 62, crossbowmen can be trained in 1 month, the shortest possible training time.

The effective range of artillery very much depends on the weight of the projectile it launches.

The reason an arbalest outranges a ballista is that it is firing a vastly lighter projectile - an arbalest bolt fires a 0.04lb (300 grain) bolt with about 100 joules. A light ballista fires a 1lb bolt with about 450 joules. A medium ballista fires a 3lb bolt with about 1,335 joules.

In theory artillery range will increase up to a point by decreasing the weight of its projectile. For simplicity, however, I made the assumption that artillery firing "non-standard" weight projectiles decrease their maximum range because of scatter, overkill, big spoon / small stone, etc.

I would say a light ballista firing a 1 / 3lb projectile could deal 1d8 damage with a maximum effective range of 500 yards.

Stacking Morale Modifiers - Command

<http://www.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/stacking-morale-modifiers-command>

October 14, 2014

Tag: Q&A

koewn wrote:

This is essentially a follow up to the unresolved question here:

<http://www2.autarch.co/forums/house-rules/hr-campaign-class-warmaster>

I'm going to be proposing a new campaign to my old college DM, who's woken back up with the release of 5E - I asked him if he'd ever had any love for the domain level game and he replied 'Yes, that's why I liked Birthright so much.' and I was like, "Oh, wee lamb, let me show you this ACKS." Anyway, I've got a custom race I've been working on that is given the Command proficiency as a custom power at Racial 0.

(edit: bah! Command happens at Racial 4, mixed it up with Leadership in my head)

I'm also a fan of the Aristocrat/Warlord class that floats around a few places here that gets Command as a custom power at Level 1.

Should that stack? You're looking at a minimum of +4 to morale, +5 at 5th level, and likely a CHA mod on top of that.

Assume a +1 CHA, that's +6 morale for a directly commanded unit, or a minimum of 8 - Waver, but only a ~3% chance of that (2 on 2d6).

The army modifier for the same is a +3, that's a minimum (assuming a CHA-less unit commander) of Flee, again, a ~3% chance.

I'm inclined to let it happen, for the following reasons:

1) D@W's Morale Phase is solid and effective, and even a unit with a +6 MM will eventually have enough sense beat into it by situational modifiers that a result of Flee gets at least into the 15% range; and, that's just one unit amongst many.

2) A battle that's going badly for this super-moraled army might mean they're getting much more punished than they would if they'd simply flee/rout - manually retreating your army is fraught with all sorts of things that can go horribly wrong.

3) Related to the previous, the full modifier is only for a single unit, and that's cut in half (round up) for the entire army. The devious DM may allow this super-commander's reputation to precede him or her, and opponents would do well to have some stratagem to eliminate the general ASAP. A kill-the-general gambit is never not fun.

Since D@W's been out a while and we've all got some experience with the Morale Phase, I'd appreciate other thoughts on the matter; espc. with what I may be missing in this.

Thanks!

I think allowing the Morale Modifier to stack is fine within the context of the tabletop game. As you point, it will only result in commanders that are above-the-"legal"-limit in a small number of edge cases.

The real impact is societal or structural or inter-class. What will it mean if all of the best and most charismatic leaders come from the same race and class? It seems like it would have implications on who runs the world, who leads the armies, etc.